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### The landscape of child protection research in the UK

**Citation for published version:**

Taylor, J, Mackay, K, Jones, C, Soliman, F, Clayton, E, Anderson, A, Gadda, A & Jones, D 2015, *The landscape of child protection research in the UK: A UK mapping review*. The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre.  
<<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/landscape-child-protection-research-united-kingdom.pdf>>

**Link:**

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**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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RESEARCH REPORT (K201505)

# **The landscape of child protection research in the UK**

A UK mapping review



This report describes a study that explored the scope of empirical research on child protection undertaken in the four nations of the UK between 2010 and 2014.

**Authors: Julie Taylor, Kirsteen Mackay, Andressa Gadda, Francesca Soliman, Estelle Clayton, Christine Jones, Derek Jones, Anna Anderson**

17<sup>th</sup> April, 2015



**NSPCC**

**Author Contributions:** JT was the Principal Investigator (PI) and KM the project lead. JT, KM and CJ designed the study under advice from Lisa Harker at NSPCC. JT, KM and CJ developed, piloted and refined the research methods and the structure of the SPSS dataset. All contributed to refinement of inclusion criteria and codification. KM, FS and EC screened and coded the academic literature, AG screened and coded the grey literature. DJ undertook further analysis and revision. FS undertook quality control checks. AG and EC screened and analysed the webpages of funder websites. AA searched financial statements of funders and provided administrative support. CJ led the development of the discussion section. All contributed to the analysis and report writing. Team meetings were held weekly throughout the study period.

**Additional contributions:** The librarians at NSPCC, Anne Marsh, Tamar Moselle, Karen Nevard and Laura Pearson, carried out searches for grey literature. Nahad Gilbert, Academic Support Librarian in Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, provided guidance on the use of publication databases for systematic reviews of literature. Marshall Dozier, Academic Liaison Librarian, University of Edinburgh, provided detailed guidance on the use of different software for the effective screening, transfer and storage of data. Mike Titterton provided support on information relating to the funding data.

**The Child Protection Research Centre works to help improve the recognition, response and prevention of child maltreatment through independent research, academic leadership and education.** Positioned within the University of Edinburgh and in partnership with the NSPCC, our multi-disciplinary team is able to bring a broad, international frame of reference to help address entrenched and emerging issues in child protection. Our work is designed to strengthen advocacy, policy and practice in the UK and beyond so that children and young people are safe and survivors of abuse have access to the best care.

**Suggested citation:** Taylor, J., Mackay, K., Gadda, A., Soliman, F., Clayton, E., Jones, C., Jones D. & Anderson, A. (2015) *The Landscape of Child Protection Research in the UK: A UK mapping review*. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Child Protection Research Centre/NSPCC.

University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre  
Simon Laurie House, 186-198 Canongate, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ  
Email: [childprotection@ed.ac.uk](mailto:childprotection@ed.ac.uk) | Tel: +44 (0)131 651 4033  
[www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk](http://www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk) | Twitter: @ChildProtectRes

The University of Edinburgh is a charitable body, registered in Scotland. Registration number SC005336.  
NSPCC registered charity numbers 216401 and SC037717.

Document id: K201505

# Contents

<b>List of tables.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>List of figures .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Outline of the project.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Aim .....	9
2.2 Research questions.....	9
2.3 Methods.....	9
2.3.1 Search strategy for academic literature.....	10
2.3.2 Search strategy for grey literature .....	13
2.3.3 Survey of Funders.....	14
2.4 Strengths and limitations .....	15
<b>3. Findings .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 Research question 1: How can child protection research be classified? .....	16
3.2 Research question 2: What child protection research has been published between January, 2010 and December, 2014? 17	
3.2.1 Research question 2a: What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia? .....	21
3.2.2 Research question 2b: Who undertakes child protection research in the UK? .....	21
3.2.3 Research question 2c: In which disciplines was the research undertaken?.....	23
3.2.4 Research question 2d: On what aspects of child protection has the research focused? .....	25
3.2.5 Research question 2e: What research designs have been used?.....	30
3.2.6 Research question 2f: What types of data have been used?.....	31
3.2.7 Research question 2g: Whose perspectives have been included?.....	32
3.3 Research question 3: Who funded the research and how much has been allocated?.....	33
3.3.1 Phase 1 findings: Academic and grey literature funding .....	33
3.3.2 Phase 2 findings: Funding landscape dataset .....	34
<b>4. Discussion.....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1 Research question 1: How can child protection research be classified? .....	37
4.2 Research question 2: What child protection research has been published between Jan 2010 and Dec 2014? .....	38
4.2.1 Research question 2a: What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia? .....	39
4.2.2 Research question 2b: Who undertakes child protection research in the UK.....	39
4.2.3 Research question 2c: In which disciplines was the research undertaken?.....	40
4.2.4 Research question 2d: On what aspects of child protection has the research focused? .....	41
4.2.5 Research question 2e: What research designs have been used?.....	42
4.2.6 Research question 2f: What types of data have been used?.....	43
4.2.7 Research question 2g: Whose perspectives have been included?.....	44
4.3 Research question 3: Who funded the research & how much money has been allocated to the research? .....	45
4.4 Conclusion.....	46
<b>5. References .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>6. Appendices.....</b>	<b>51</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for academic and grey literature .....	11
Table 2: Substantive topics in child protection research.....	17
Table 3: Journals Publishing Research ( $n = \geq 10$ ).....	21
Table 4: Proportion of research led by a university-based academic.....	21
<b>Table 5: Academic literature by University of first author (<math>\geq 10</math> publications)</b> .....	22
Table 6: Affiliations of authors of grey literature published between 2010 and 2014.....	23
Table 7: Substantive topics addressed in the research.....	29
Table 8: Substantive topics in child protection research.....	59

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram (Papers in academic journals).....	18
Figure 2: Grey Literature Search Outcomes .....	19
Figure 3: Country of origin of data .....	20
Figure 4: Percentage of first named authors by academic discipline (where known) .....	24
Figure 5: Maltreatment Types researched in grey and academic literature .....	26
Figure 6: Specific maltreatment types and first author of academic paper.....	27
Figure 7: Specific maltreatment types and first author of grey literature.....	28
Figure 8: Percentage of publications utilising different research designs in the academic and grey literature datasets .....	30
Figure 9: Methods used for obtaining primary data from research participants .....	31
Figure 10: Direct views obtained in the academic ( $n=321$ ) and grey ( $n=179$ ) literature .....	33
Figure 11: Proportion of child protection research funded by 17 organisations.....	35
Figure 12: Proportion of funding by each organisation (total awards approximately £42m) .....	36

## Executive Summary

This study, undertaken for the NSPCC, is the first comprehensive systematic search and mapping review of research undertaken in all four nations of the United Kingdom on the subject of child protection. It covers the five year timespan January, 2010 through December, 2014 to produce a mapping review on the landscape of child protection.

The research questions were:

- 1) How can child protection research be classified?
- 2) What child protection research has been published between January, 2010 and December, 2014?
  - a. What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia?
  - b. Who undertakes child protection research in the UK?
  - c. In which disciplines was the research undertaken?
  - d. On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?
  - e. What research designs have been used?
  - f. What types of data have been used?
  - g. Whose perspectives have been included?
- 3) Who funded the research and how much money has been allocated to the research?

To answer these questions we undertook a comprehensive literature review where we mapped and categorised existing literature to determine gaps and patterns. We did not undertake quality checks on research rigour at this stage, but used a comprehensive search process with clear and replicable methods. We have provided a detailed and comprehensive portrait of the overall child protection research landscape in the UK, showing the general topography. We are not, however, claiming to have detailed every single tree and stream.

A concurrent search of more than 94 databases was used to locate the academic literature, with further additional checks against other sources to confirm completeness. Grey literature was searched primarily through the NSPCC catalogues with some adjunct searches of key organisations. A two stage screening process examined the literature against inclusion criteria that determined the literatures' reported empirical research on child maltreatment in the UK. All included articles were coded onto an 85 field SPSS dataset. A total of 467 academic articles and 243 items of grey literature met the inclusion criteria and were coded onto the SPSS dataset, a combined total of 710. An additional search of 53 funding councils and key funders of child protection research was undertaken.

The data collected in this project represent a comprehensive map of UK child protection research in the last five years, providing a reliable evidence base to inform further academic research, child protection policy development, and the priorities of research funders. The rigour of our search strategy was tested regularly throughout the process, and the robust methodology employed by the research team allows us to appropriately address the research questions. Despite its comprehensiveness, however, it should be recognised that some child protection articles will have been missed due to the idiosyncrasies of *Searcher* and other individual databases used.

In summary, the answers to the research questions are as follows:

### **1) How can child protection research be classified?**

This study has resulted in a codification system for research literature on child protection comprising 11 different substantive topics, nine different research designs and seven different maltreatment types.

### **2) What child protection research has been published between Jan 2010 and Dec 2014?**

A total of 710 academic and grey literature publications met our inclusion criteria as empirical research undertaken within the four nations of the UK on child protection between 2010 and 2014. Of these, 467 were academic articles and 243 were grey literature. During the search process around 1,489 academic papers on the topic of child protection were excluded, as they did not meet the criterion of being empirical research. The research is published across a large number of journals, some child protection specific and some more generic in focus. Studies were reporting on findings from all four UK nations.

#### ***a. What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia?***

The first author in around three quarters of academic publications was affiliated to a university with the remainder affiliated to other organisations such as clinical departments in the health service. In the case of grey literature, a smaller proportion, that is around two fifths of first authors, were affiliated to universities and three fifths of first authors were affiliated to other organisations.

#### ***b. Who undertakes child protection research in the UK?***

Research activity in the field of child protection in the UK is widely distributed across a total of 120 different academic institutions and 106 non-academic organisations. A small number of universities appear to be particularly research active in this field based on the frequency of academic publications. These are Kings College London, University College London, University of Bristol, University of Central Lancashire and University of East Anglia, University of Edinburgh, Cardiff University and Queens University Belfast.

#### ***c. In which disciplines was the research undertaken?***

The analysis of the academic discipline of the first named authors revealed thirteen distinct disciplines undertaking child protection research in the UK. Around three quarters of this research was undertaken by first authors from the disciplines of psychology (28%), medicine (14%), social work (14%) and psychiatry (12%). Information about the discipline of the first author was available for 96 of the 173 first named authors in our grey literature dataset. Of these, the most common discipline was social work (34%), followed by social and public policy (18%) and psychology (12%).

Collaborative research was common, whether monodisciplinary or multidisciplinary in nature. Collaborations between psychologists and psychiatrists were among the most common with these individuals often working within the same research centres. There were also collaborations with researchers from North America, elsewhere in Europe, Australia and New Zealand in a significant minority of cases, usually involving academics from psychiatry. Some disciplines appear to be less active producers of academic outputs such as law, allied health professionals, criminology and education.

*d. On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?*

In the academic literature 39% of publications focused on child maltreatment as a generic category. Where particular types of maltreatment were identified there was often more than one form of abuse that was the subject of the research. Sexual abuse was the most frequently occurring type of maltreatment to be considered in isolation from other forms of abuse with a third of the academic literature considering this subject alone. This compares with 19% of articles focusing solely on physical abuse and 13% of articles focusing on neglect. Trafficking was the least mentioned type of abuse.

The codification system for research topics is explained in appendix 2. The nature of consequences or outcomes in adulthood was the most frequently researched substantive topic in the academic literature (21%) followed by system or practice responses (14%), attitudes and beliefs (11%) and nature of consequences or outcomes in childhood (11%). In relation to the grey literature, system or practice responses (30%) and incidence and prevalence (21%) were also common substantive topics, along with publications concerned with attitudes and beliefs (8%), aetiology of child maltreatment (8%) **and children's experiences (8%)**.

Very little academic literature and grey literature on children under one, black and minority ethnic children and disabled children was published between 2010 and 2014.

*e. What research designs have been used?*

A qualitative design was the most commonly employed research strategy in the academic literature (33%). This varied across discipline with only 8% of studies in medicine having a qualitative design compared to over half of studies from social work, law, sociology, social science and nursing. Surveys were the next most utilised design (13%) followed by non-experimental evaluations (12%) and cohort studies (11%). 0.9% of academic papers reported the results of a randomised controlled trial.

Almost half (45%) of studies in the grey literature used a qualitative design. Very few studies were randomised controlled trials (0.8%) or quasi-experimental designs (0.4%). It was not fully possible to classify the type of research design



adopted by studies in 10% of the grey literature. This may have been a reflection of **the author's intention** to tailor the publication for a non-academic audience.

Six longitudinal studies were reported in the academic literature and three in the grey literature.

*f. What types of data have been used?*

90% of academic and 81% of grey publications reported findings from the collation of an original dataset (i.e. primary research). Of these, nearly three quarters of studies both in the academic and grey literature collated data from research participants. The most frequently adopted method used for both sets of literature was the interview, followed by questionnaire or survey. Use of documentary and administrative data was also popular. Mixed methods were common.

*g. Whose perspectives have been included?*

Direct views were taken in 69% of all the studies reported in the academic literature. In 25% of these studies the views of adult survivors of abuse were taken, while 17% of studies took the views of practitioners. Twenty-two percent reported a mix of views; 5% the views of perpetrators, 5% the views of foster carers and 3% the views of the public.

Direct views were taken in 73% of studies in the grey literature. Most of these (48%) took the views of more than one group of participants, whilst 21% took the direct views only of practitioners and 13% only of children up to the age of 18. Very few studies focused exclusively on the views of perpetrators (1%) or foster carers (0.4%).

### **3) Who funded the research and how much money has been allocated to the research?**

Funding sources were reported in 58% of the academic literature and in 67.9% of the grey literature. Over 70 different funders were mentioned in the academic literature alone. The most frequently mentioned funders were: Medical Research Council; Economic and Social Research Council; Department of Health.

A total of 62 organisations were identified as funders in the grey literature. The most frequently mentioned funders were the Department for Education (DfE) and the NSPCC, with each funding 27 studies.

Additional work was undertaken to identify funding amounts. Due to many difficulties in gathering this information, only 17 organisations were included in the final funders dataset. These organisations funded awards to the approximate total value of £42M over the five years.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This research is the first comprehensive systematic search and review of research undertaken in all four nations of the United Kingdom on the subject of child protection. It covers the five year timespan January, 2010 through to December, 2014 to produce a mapping review on the landscape of child protection.

There have been some previous attempts to analyse research evidence relevant to child protection specifically or social work research more generally within certain parameters. For example, Shaw et al (2004) and Shaw and Norton (2007) developed a framework for appraising both the nature and the quality of social work research specifically that had been undertaken in universities within the United Kingdom. From an analysis of 40 articles published within the *British Journal of Social Work* they developed a typology of social work research across two dimensions, one focusing on the what (or who) was the substantive focus (e.g. children, adult offenders) and the second on what the primary problem was (e.g. how to describe the system; how to understand issues of ethnicity). They concluded that the classification of research by substantive 'kinds' was challenging.

In 2007, Tarara and Daniel published an *Audit of Scottish Child Care and Protection Research*, which reviewed research carried out during the period 1997-2007. Focussing on this one nation, they defined research very broadly to include qualitative and quantitative research, audit activities, mapping exercises and large and small-scale evaluations carried out primarily in Scotland. The broad approach resulted in a database of 342 publications over the 10 year period.

Unlike the research by Shaw and Norton, Tarara and Daniel's aim was to create an accessible database of relevant research as well as to identify the gaps in evidence that should be addressed. Their review of the literature made systematic use of research databases and included a survey of researchers in Scotland. It encompassed research across disciplines (not being limited to social work). They did not aim to assess the quality of the research. The publications in the *EndNote* library database they created were sorted into three categories depending on whether the research focused on core/proximal aspects of the child protection system or distal factors, or whether the focus was on the context (such as socioeconomic factors).

Among their conclusions were the observations that researchers tend to underutilise statistical data and often fail to link research to relevant legislation. They recommended that:

There is a need for a mechanism to better coordinate child protection-related research within and across disciplines and professions, as well as for the collation and dissemination of information about relevant research (Tarara and Daniel 2007).

As far as we know, the landscape project presented here is the first to create a dataset enabling detailed analysis of the child protection research literature arising from a comprehensive mapping of UK empirical studies. It is also the first that considers the research design and

methods utilised across a range of disciplines, which may spur innovation in research design across a range of disciplines, and ultimately a more robust and richer methodological understanding in this field.

The context for research into child protection and child maltreatment in the UK deserves mention. Four contextual aspects should be taken into consideration, which serve to emphasise the case for continued, and indeed increased, funding for research in these areas throughout the UK.

First, it is readily evident that there is a significantly enhanced profile of child abuse and exploitation in the media, in the wake of various official inquiries recently completed or currently under way. Second, there is the emergence of 'newer' forms of harmful risks to children and young people, such as those entailed in online security, social media, bullying and trafficking. These require to be better understood by researchers, funders, practitioners and policy makers. Third, the steady accumulation of robust, scientific findings over time on aspects of risk and resilience, including the long-term effects of maltreatment, makes the establishment of a coherent evidence base a meaningful possibility. Fourth, the four countries of the UK have diverse administrative and organisational arrangements, but with shared features in common. Much can be learned from inter-UK, as well as intra-country, studies of patterns and trends in harmful risks and the range of responses required to meet these.

## 2. OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

### 2.1 Aim

To explore the scope of research into child abuse and neglect (collectively referred to as maltreatment) undertaken in the four nations of the United Kingdom over a five year period.

### 2.2 Research questions

- 1) How can child protection research be classified?
- 2) What child protection research has been published between Jan 2010 and Dec 2014?
  - a. What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia?
  - b. Who undertakes child protection research in the UK?
  - c. Which disciplines was the research undertaken by?
  - d. On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?
  - e. What research designs have been used?
  - f. What types of data have been used?
  - g. Whose perspectives have been included?
- 3) Who funded the research and how much money has been allocated to the research?

### 2.3 Methods

To answer these questions we undertook a comprehensive literature review following the refinements and guidance of the EPPI-Centre (2012)<sup>1</sup>. Grant and Booth (2009) described a typology of 14 review types and associated methodologies, which are often overlapping. In their typology this study would be described as a mapping review/systematic map:

*Mapping reviews enable the contextualization of in-depth systematic literature reviews within broader literature and identification of gaps in the evidence base. They are a valuable tool in offering policymakers, practitioners and researchers an explicit and transparent means of identifying narrower policy and practice-relevant review questions. Systematic maps may characterize studies in other ways such as according to theoretical perspective, population group or the setting within which studies were undertaken. In addition to describing the research field, a systematic map can also provide the basis for an informed decision about whether to undertake the in-depth review and synthesis on all of the studies or just a subset* (Grant and Booth 2009 p97).

We mapped and categorised existing literature to determine gaps and patterns. We did not undertake quality checks on research rigour at this stage, but used a comprehensive search process where methods are clear and replicable (Allen et al 2006). Commissioning of further

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), Institute of Education, London

reviews from the dataset, which could include methodological scrutiny, is possible from the dataset. Methods are more fully described in Appendix 1. We have provided a detailed and comprehensive portrait of the overall child protection research landscape in the UK, showing the general topography. We are not, however, claiming to have detailed every single tree and stream.

### 2.3.1 Search strategy for academic literature

The University of Edinburgh search engine *Searcher* was used to locate the academic literature as it enables a concurrent search of over 94 databases (see Appendix 1). The team worked closely with Academic Support Librarians in agreeing use of software for the screening and storage of a publications database (from *Searcher* to *EndNote*). A separate search was made of the ASSIA database as this is not included in *Searcher*. The search parameters were: academic articles published in English between January, 2010 and December, 2014. The five years included in the search were broken down into manageable six month periods following the pattern: January to June and July to December.

The search terms were:

(child\* or infant or baby or babies or teenage\* or young) AND (abuse or neglect or maltreat\* or exploit\* or bulli\* or bully or "child protection" or adopt\* or foster\*) AND (Britain or British or Kingdom or Scot\* or Welsh or Wales or Ireland or Irish).

#### 2.3.1.1 SCREEN ONE

Screening was divided into two phases: screen one and screen two.

Each article returned on *Searcher* was subject to an initial screen to see if it met the inclusion criteria:

**Table 1:** Inclusion and exclusion criteria for academic and grey literature

Term	Inclusion	Exclusion
United Kingdom	Where <i>both</i> UK data and at least one author affiliated with UK institution.	Where at least one of the two inclusion criteria do not apply.
Child Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes primary, secondary and tertiary interventions.</li> <li>Physical, sexual, emotional/psych abuse and neglect and exposure to domestic abuse.</li> <li>Includes bullying, peer abuse (and cyber-crimes)</li> <li>Includes all research related to looked after children (<i>see</i> Appendix 1).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On self-harm or suicide – unless expressly within the context of child maltreatment</li> <li>On substance misuse – unless expressly within the context of child maltreatment</li> <li>Papers concerned only with how to undertake research in child protection / research ethics.</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When either original data collected and analysed OR original analysis of existing data.</li> <li>Includes systematic and other replicable literature review and meta-analysis (unless clear that none of the data from the UK).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No primary data collected and no original secondary analysis of existing data.</li> <li>Non-systematic review.</li> <li>Opinion pieces/editorials/ research protocols.</li> <li>Articles on training needs of professionals (e.g.: social workers).</li> <li>Articles which are <i>descriptive only</i> of standard system response or an intervention.</li> <li>Report of single case study unless systematically analysed in a replicable manner.</li> <li>Articles conceptualising child abuse and neglect.</li> </ul>

As screen one was intended as an initial screen articles were evaluated as meeting inclusion/exclusion criteria according to their title, abstract, and key words. In cases where this approach did not provide the necessary information then the researcher would access the full text and assess according to abstract and methodology.

Articles were screened according to a hierarchy of exclusion. Articles were screened first on the basis of whether they met our criteria for UK research. They were then screened according to our criteria for child protection. The final check was to verify if the article met our criteria for research. Papers were excluded on the basis of the first observed exclusion criteria using this approach.

All included articles from each six month period were exported from *Searcher* to *EndNote*.

### 2.3.1.2 SCREEN TWO

Each article exported to *EndNote* was then screened in more depth. Any duplicates that had been exported were deleted. PDF versions of each reference were retrieved using *EndNote's* 'find pdf' function. When this function was not successful a hand search of *Google*, *Google Scholar*, and *ResearchGate* was conducted.

To ensure probity of the screening strategy we then reassessed articles in depth by accessing the full text and assessing the introduction and methodology according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria used in screen one.

### 2.3.1.3 CODING STRATEGY

All articles included in screen two were then coded onto an SPSS dataset consisting of 85 fields. Each field captured different information about the research.

Fields 1-26 captured information on: first named author; first named UK author (when first named author was not from the UK); affiliated institution and affiliated institution of first author and first UK author (where this is different); academic discipline of first author and first UK author; discipline and institution of second and third UK authors (where applicable); nature of international collaboration (where applicable); UK nation(s) of the data; nation of data from outside the UK.

Fields 27-42 captured information on the focus of the research: the type or types of maltreatment considered (See Appendix 9 for further information on maltreatment types); the substantive topic of the research (All substantive topics are presented in Table 2 with an example publication); ages of the children on which the research focused; if the research addressed NSPCC priorities as outlined in the strategy to 2016.

Fields 42- 69 captured information on the research methods and data collection: types of data collated (or used as the basis of a secondary analysis); whose perspectives were captured by the research (such as children, parent, practitioner, perpetrator, bystander, member of the public), methods by which the data was obtained.

Fields 70-71 captured information about the typology of research design: qualitative research, survey, case-control study, cohort study, randomised controlled study, quasi experimental study, non-experimental evaluation, and systematic review.

Fields 72-85 captured information on funding: first, second, and third named funders; type of funding (grant or fellowship); funder's reference number.

### 2.3.1.4 CHECKS TO ROBUSTNESS

To maintain rigour and comprehensiveness, we undertook a series of quality checks throughout the process. These are detailed in Appendix 3 and included:

1. A manual check of every 2013 edition of 10 key academic journals.
2. Known prolific researcher websites and journal listings interrogated.
3. A further fourteen additional and alternate search terms were tested.
4. A benchmarking exercise on all articles produced within the Child Protection Research Centre.
5. Search terms run through *PubMed* and compared with *Searcher*.

### 2.3.2 Search strategy for grey literature

The grey literature search was a comprehensive review of the available resources in the NSPCC library catalogue and websites of a further 14 organisations (see Appendix 4). There were ten distinctive searches carried out using keyword search strategies similar to the academic literature and undertaken by our colleagues at the NSPCC library (see Appendix 4).

The same inclusion/exclusion criteria used for the academic literature (table 1) search were also used for the grey literature. The search parameters were: books or online reports published in English between January 2009 and December 2014.

In addition to these searches we also looked at studies listed in the recently created web-based register of UK child protection research, a project based at the University of Huddersfield that aims to catalogue all child protection research carried out in the UK over the past 20 years. Furthermore, we scrutinised a list of studies submitted to us by the Scottish Government. These combined resources generated only a further two studies that complied with our inclusion criteria. Further details about these resources and their contents can be found in Appendix 5 and 6.

Although the inclusion criteria for the grey literature were the same as those adopted for the academic literature some concessions had to be made. Unlike, in the academic literature, there are no conventions or expectations as to whether or how the research design, methodology or findings of a study should be reported in the grey literature. Thus, grey publications which might not have passed the 'research' test in the academic literature, either because they were not clear about how or from whom information was obtained or did not specify how the literature search had been carried out, were still included in the grey literature dataset. Where doubts arose about whether a publication should be included or not, a second reviewer would also check it and a decision then be reached regarding inclusion.



### 2.3.3 Survey of Funders

As well as coding the research funder where this information was available from publications, an additional survey of funders was undertaken to add detail to the funding landscape for UK child protection research. This information can be used to inform discussions as to how best to use available resources, for example, by indicating areas of possible collaboration between funding bodies. There were three distinctive phases to this search:

#### Phase 1: Scoping exercise

Phase 1 was a scoping exercise whereby we contacted eight organisations who had previously funded child protection research and who had agreed at an NSPCC forum to provide us with a list of all child protection related research funded by their organisations between 2010 and 2014. We also contacted an independent researcher who had undertaken a scoping of third sector funders for the NSPCC. We received five responses.

#### Phase 2: Screening of websites of funding organisations identified by academic and grey literature searches

One hundred and thirteen organisations were identified as funders of research in the academic and grey literature searches. Of these 68 funded one research study each and were therefore excluded from the website search. The websites of the remaining 45 organisations were thoroughly interrogated for information on funding pertinent to and available for child protection research in the UK.

#### Phase 3: Additional screening for outliers

Additional website searches were made of a further eight major research funding organisations, such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, that the research team were aware of having funded, or being likely to fund, child protection research in the UK but which were missing from the list used in phase 2. This brought the total number of funders surveyed to 53.

The second and third phases of the searches proved more difficult than anticipated. In most cases, there were no easily accessible lists on the websites of what research was being, or had been funded by such organisations. When that was the case, we undertook website searches **using the term 'fund\*' and screened the returns. Where no returns were yielded, we screened** each section within organisational website sitemaps. We operated a three strike rule and if at this stage the information could still not be found then the funder was omitted from the search. Funded projects and publications that were included after applying the same inclusion/exclusion criteria used for the academic and grey literature were then coded onto SPSS according to: title of research project or publication; principal investigator (PI); who funded the research; what type of funding (grant, fellowship, indeterminable); total value of the funding; the start date; the end date.

## 2.4 Strengths and limitations

The data collected in this project represents a comprehensive map of UK child protection research in the last five years, providing a reliable evidence base to inform further academic research, child protection policy development, and the priorities of research funders. The rigour of our search strategy was tested regularly throughout the process, and the robust methodology employed by the research team allows us to appropriately address the research questions.

Nonetheless, some limitations need to be taken into account when reflecting upon the project's results. Definitional issues may apply, as both our screening strategy and coding framework **have relied heavily on the NSPCC's conceptualisation of key notions such as child or maltreatment**. We are confident in these conceptualisations, but we recognise that there is a lack of consensus on these definitions. Furthermore, whilst great care was taken to ensure that our inclusion and exclusion criteria could maintain a fair balance between sensitivity and specificity, it should be noted that the strict classification of what constitutes empirical research within the academic literature may have led to an underrepresentation of disciplines such as psychotherapy or law, which often rely on single case studies. On the other hand, our efforts to be comprehensive in our search and the lack of a quality judgement resulted in an extremely diverse range of studies being collected, with different research aims, methodologies, and sample sizes. This variety should be taken into account when drawing conclusions from the aggregated data.

It is important to note that the search for funders and financial information was neither systematic nor comprehensive as it was mostly based on the information gathered from the academic and grey literature searches, as well as personal knowledge of organisations that fund, or are likely to fund, research on child protection. It was also limited to information which is in the public domain and that is accessible to skilled searchers.

Finally, it should be recognised that, despite its comprehensiveness, this search is unlikely to include every single child protection article published in the UK in the examined timeframe, partly because of the already mentioned definitional issues, and partly because of the idiosyncrasies of *Searcher* and other individual databases used. However, supplementing the academic literature with a wide search of grey publications undoubtedly increased the completeness of the dataset. Furthermore, the numerous benchmark exercises carried out throughout the data collection phase have shown that, in the most conservative estimate, our search has captured at least 75% of all available UK child protection research published in the last five years, thus showing our data to be representative of the current landscape of research.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1 Research question 1: How can child protection research be classified?

In order to answer the question, 'On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?' we developed a classification framework for the maltreatment type and the primary substantive topic of the research in the academic literature and the grey literature. In relation to the maltreatment type we used the following commonly accepted extant descriptors:

- Sexual
- Physical
- Neglect
- Emotional
- Exposure to domestic abuse
- Bullying
- Trafficking

We categorised the substantive topic of the research (using the methodology described in section 2.7 and identified 11 topics. Table 2 lists these substantive topics with examples from the dataset in Appendix 2.

**Table 2: Substantive topics in child protection research**

<b>Substantive Topics in Child Protection Research</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b>Aetiology e.g. Yates et al (2012).</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Therapeutic interventions in adulthood e.g. Valerio et al (2010).</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Therapeutic interventions in childhood e.g. Kirton et al (2011).</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Preventative interventions e.g. Barron et al (2011).</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Children's experiences e.g. van Gijn et al (2013).</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Incidence and prevalence e.g. Bebbington et al (2011).</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Nature of consequences or outcomes of child maltreatment in adulthood e.g. Hepgul et al (2012).</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Nature of consequences or outcomes of child maltreatment in childhood e.g. Kumsta et al (2012).</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Assessment/diagnosis e.g. Leung et al (2011).</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>System/practice responses to child maltreatment e.g. Pearce et al (2014).</b>
<b>11.</b>	<b>Attitudes and beliefs e.g. McCartan, K. (2013).</b>

Further details on the substantive topics can be found at Appendix 3.

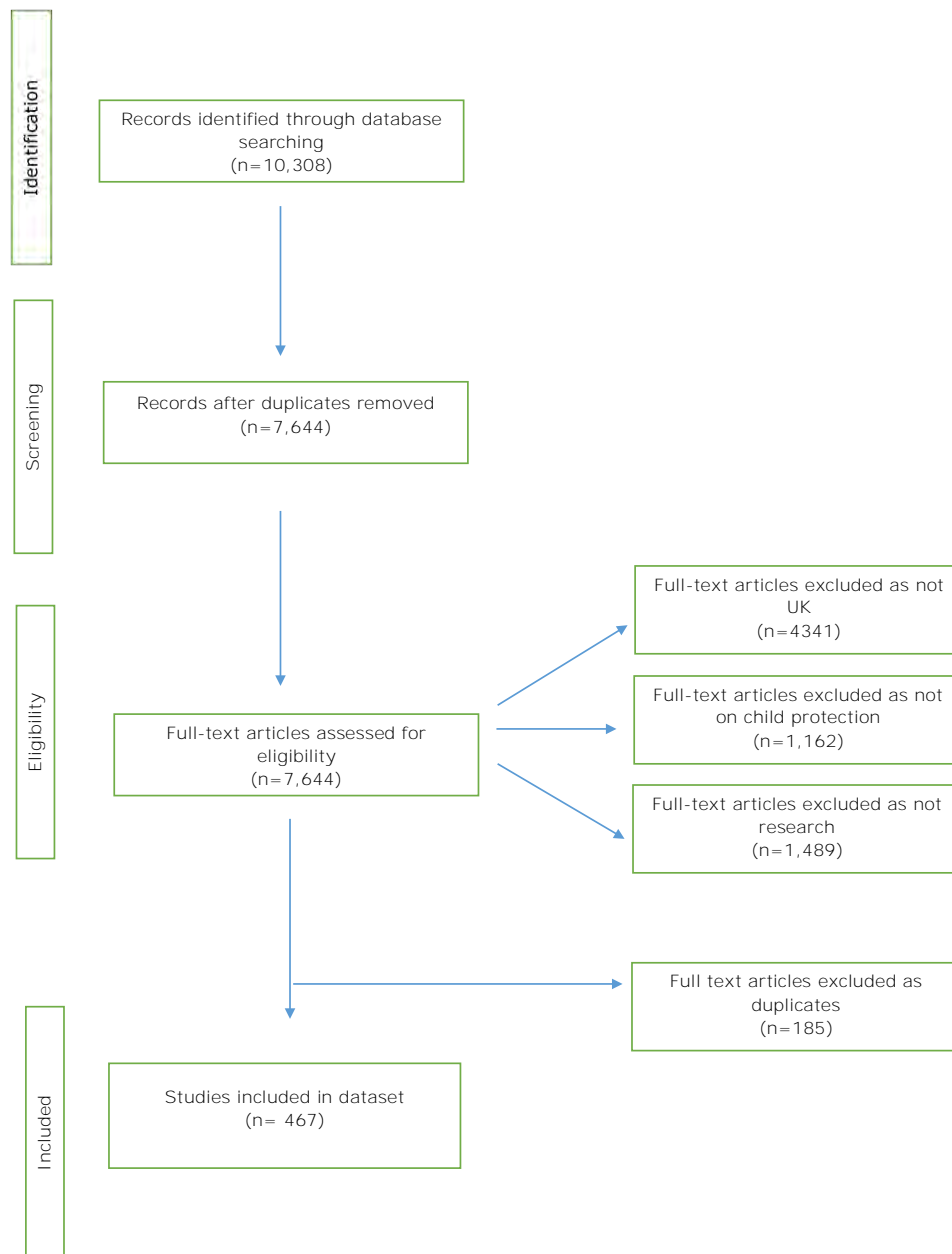
## **3.2 Research question 2: What child protection research has been published between January, 2010 and December, 2014?**

This study identified 467 papers (referred to from this point as the academic literature) meeting our definition of child protection research and published in peer reviewed journals between January 2010 and December 2014. In addition there were 243 items of grey literature identified that were published within the same timeframe. The total number of publications included in this mapping review is therefore 710 (Appendix 7). Where we report percentages these have been rounded to the nearest whole figure.

### **Academic Literature: outcomes of the screening process**

Figure 1 reports the screening process for the academic literature utilising the PRISMA convention for reporting systematic reviews (Moher et al, 2009). Across the 60 month period, the majority of journal articles were excluded because they lacked either a UK author or UK data (n=4,341). The next highest number were excluded as they were not reporting on research - but rather they lacked theoretical or opinion pieces or a note of conference proceedings or a research abstract only (n=1,489). The remaining exclusions (n=1,162) were due to being out of scope (not related to child protection or looked after children).

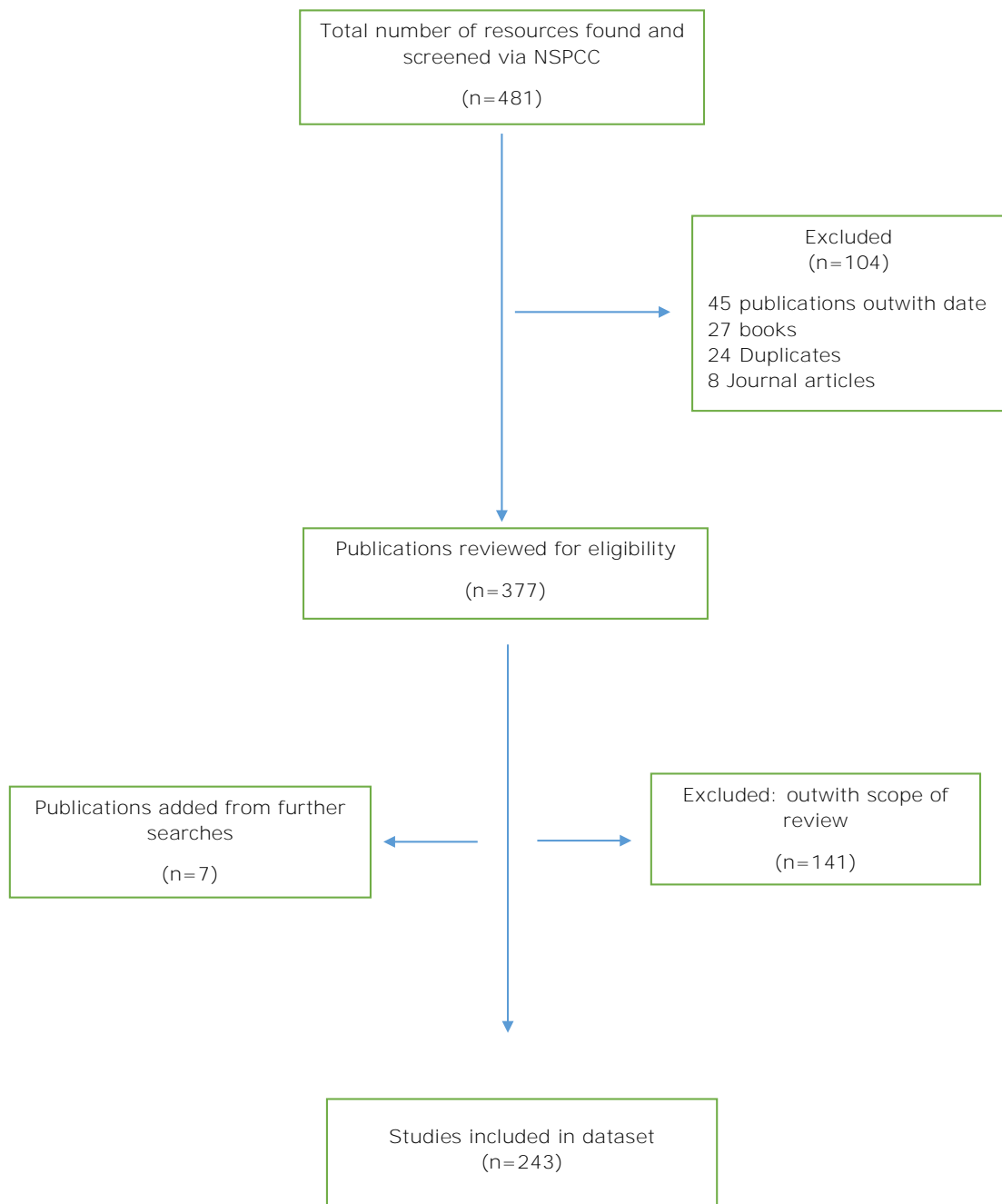
**Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram (Papers in academic journals)**



## Grey Literature: outcomes of the screening process

Searches of the NSPCC library catalogue, information provided by the Scottish Government, and a web-based register of child protection research hosted by the University of Huddersfield identified 243 publications meeting our criteria. Figure 2 reports the outcomes of the grey literature searches.

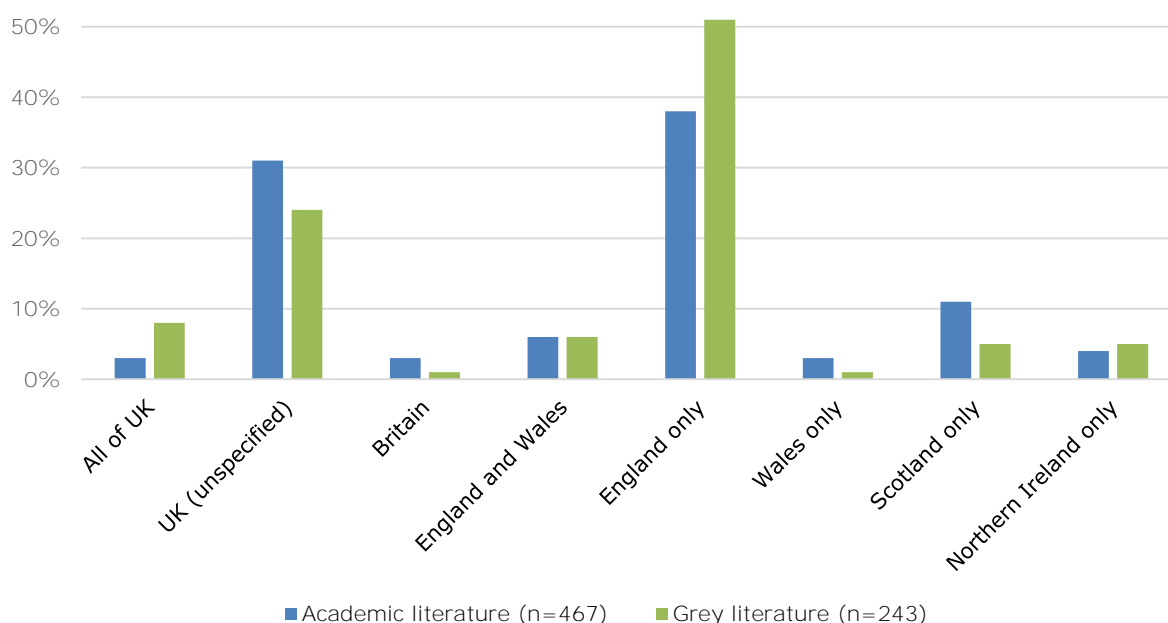
**Figure 2: Grey Literature Search Outcomes**



## Country of origin of data

Almost 33% of the academic publications reported using data from the UK without specifying which nation. When specified the data were most often collected from within England (38%), followed by Scotland (11%). Six per cent of studies collated data from both England and Wales. Three per cent collated data from at each of the four nations of the UK. (see Figure 3)

**Figure 3: Country of origin of data**



Forty-two of the academic publications reported research from data collected from other countries as well as the UK. Many of these were systematic reviews of research, which did not always state the nation of the data considered by the studies they reviewed.

Most (n=123) of the publications in the grey literature were based on research carried out in England. We report on the type of data collected in the academic and grey literature in section 3.2.6.

## Journals publishing child protection research

The 467 identified pieces of academic literature were published in over 200 journals (generic and child protection specific), most of these journals had only between one or two articles that met our inclusion criteria. The journals, which had published the greatest number of articles are shown in Table 4. Publication rates were evenly distributed for each year included in our search.

**Table 3: Journals Publishing Research (n= ≥10)**

Journal	Impact Factor <sup>1</sup>	No. of papers	% of Identified papers
Adoption & Fostering	n/a	42	9%
British Journal of Social Work	1.162	35	8%
Child Abuse Review	0.787	35	8%
Child and Family Social Work	0.824	20	4%
Journal of Sexual Aggression	0.766	14	3%
Psychological Medicine	5.428	11	2%
Journal of Child Sexual Abuse	2.280	10	2%

<sup>1</sup> The impact factor of a journal is a measure of the average number of times papers from that publication are referenced in other journals and is one indication of the influence of research contained within the journal.

### 3.2.1 Research question 2a: What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia?

Research published in journal articles was mostly led by authors affiliated to universities (76%), whereas university-based academics were identified as the first author in 40% of the grey literature (see Table 5). This finding needs to be seen in the context of the common convention of the commissioning organisation appearing as the author of reports (rather than named individuals) and the challenges of searching the grey literature. In those cases where the first author of an academic paper was not university based 40% of affiliations were identified as a named hospital, medical centre or clinic or NHS Trust. It is possible first authors in these instances also had university appointments. Other organisations included as author affiliations were local authorities or charitable organisations.

**Table 4: Proportion of research led by a university-based academic**

	Academic	Grey
First author affiliated with University	355 (76%)	96 (40%)
First author NOT affiliated with University	106 (23%)	146 (60%)
Missing data:	6	1
Total articles:	467	243

### 3.2.2 Research question 2b: Who undertakes child protection research in the UK?

Research activity in the field of child protection is widely distributed across the UK. The 467 first named authors of the academic literature were affiliated with over 120 different institutions. In most instances each organisation contributed less than 5 papers to the database. A small number of universities appear to be particularly research active in this field (see Table 5).



**Table 5: Academic literature by University of first author (≥10 publications)**

England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Kings College London University College London University of Bristol University of Central Lancashire University of East Anglia	University of Edinburgh	Cardiff University	Queens University Belfast

Kings College London (KCL) and Cardiff University had particularly high publication rates in this area. First authors from the discipline of psychiatry accounted for most of the publications on child protection at KCL; authors identified with the discipline of medicine (excluding psychiatry) accounted for half of the publications from the University of Cardiff. In Northern Ireland, the disciplines of psychology and social work accounted for almost all the child protection research within Queens University Belfast. In Scotland, the publications with a first named author at the University of Edinburgh came from a range of disciplines. Further information on the discipline of authors is provided in the next section.

All of the first named authors in the grey literature were either affiliated with (or were one of) 106 UK-based organisations identified in the dataset. Table 6 shows the most frequently identified organisations. These figures need to be seen in the context of the challenges of searching for the grey literature and some publications may have been missed. Equally some of the content of the grey literature may also have been submitted for publication in an academic journal. Nevertheless it is clear (as with the academic literature) that research activity is distributed across a wide range of organisations.

**Table 6: Affiliations of authors of grey literature published between 2010 and 2014**

Number of publications	Institutions
≥10 publications	NSPCC Ofsted
More than two but fewer than 10 publications	Action for Children <b>Barnardo's</b> Cardiff University Carole Brooks Associates Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Violence CEOP London School of Economics and Political Science Loughborough University NatCen Social Research National Foundation for Educational Research <b>Office of the Children's Commissioner for England</b> <b>Office of the Children's Rights Director for England</b> <b>The Children's Society</b> University of Bedfordshire University of Bristol University College London University of East Anglia University of Edinburgh University of Manchester University of Oxford University of Stirling University of York

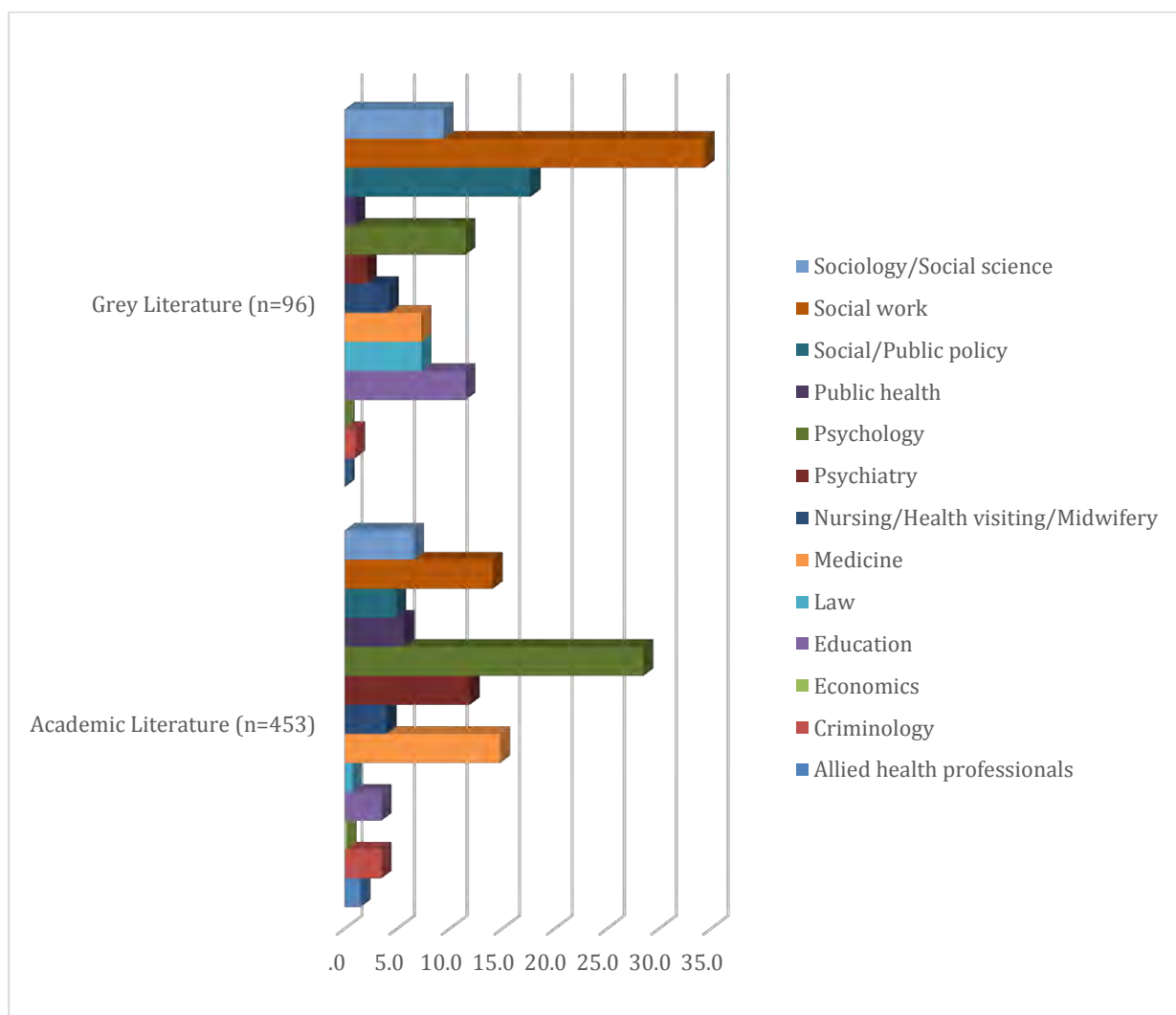
### 3.2.3 Research question 2c: In which disciplines was the research undertaken?

We reviewed the literature to identify which disciplines were (individually or collaboratively) involved in child protection research within the time frame of the review. We focused on first named authors as most authorship guidelines attribute this role to the person who has made the biggest intellectual contribution to the paper; though we are conscious this is not always the case for a variety of reasons including discipline or journal convention. It was possible to determine the academic discipline for 456 of the 467 first named authors of journal articles from the published paper or research and personal webpages.

Although some disciplines had higher levels of first authored papers than others it is evident that involvement in child protection research is wide ranging (see Figure 4). The greatest number of authors came from the discipline of psychology (28%), followed by medicine (14%), social work (14%) and psychiatry (12%). These four disciplines accounted for 34% of second authors with psychology again dominating (18%).

Information about the discipline of the first author was available for 96 of the 173 first named authors in our grey literature dataset (Figure 4). Of these, the most common discipline was social work (34%), followed by social and public policy (18%) and psychology (12%).

**Figure 4: Percentage of first named authors by academic discipline (where known)**



It is clear that most of the research published in journals is the outcome of some form of collaborative effort, as 87% of academic publications had more than one author. Similarly in the grey literature, most publications (56%) had two or more authors. This number may be an underestimation as it was quite common for the organisation funding and/or publishing the research to be named as the first, and often sole, author.

Of the included academic research 40% was undertaken by individuals from different academic discipline. Psychology had the greatest range of collaborations, co-authoring papers with all of the other disciplines except law and nursing. Collaborations between psychology and psychiatry were among the most common with authors often working within the same research centres.

The data show a degree of evidence of international collaboration in child protection research. Although the first named author of almost all the academic publications was affiliated with a UK institution, fifty-nine of the 470 academic publications had a least one author from an institution outside of the UK. Well over a third of these collaborations involved an author from North America or Canada, while in just under a third of cases the collaborator was from elsewhere in Europe. Nine of the collaborations were with authors from Australia or New Zealand (15%), while the remainder were with individuals from Asia (5%) or from more than one continent (10%). The level of international collaboration may well be higher as we excluded papers that did not contain data collected within the UK.

The percentage of the literature involving international collaboration varied across disciplines; 30% of the literature, which had a psychiatrist as the first named author was an international collaboration, compared with 3% when the first named author was from social work.

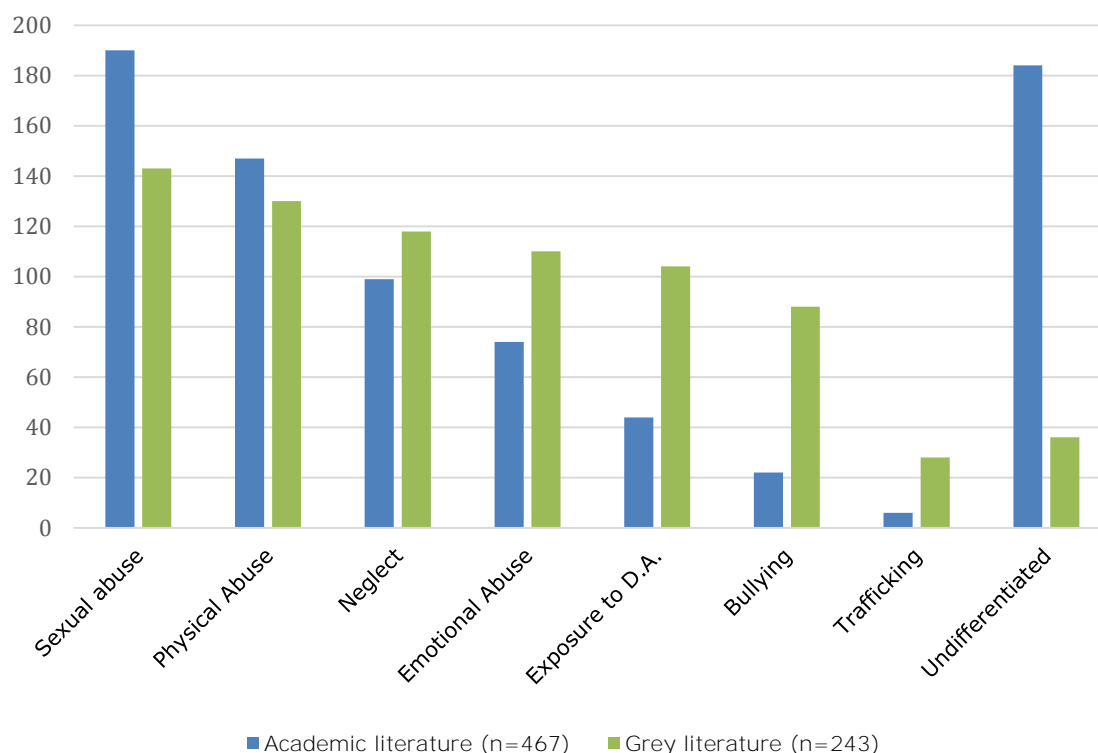
All first named authors in the grey literature were either affiliated with or were a UK based organisation. Only four studies also included data from countries outside of the UK. These international collaborations were all within Europe.

### 3.2.4 Research question 2d: On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?

#### **Maltreatment types considered by the research**

We analysed our dataset to identify the maltreatment types considered by the research and the specific topics addressed. Figure 5 presents the frequency with which different maltreatment types were considered in the academic and grey literature. Definitions of the maltreatment types can be found in Appendix 9. We are conscious of the lack of consensus around definition of terms and that some types of maltreatment could be further subdivided (for example, in our typology sexual exploitation is subsumed under the category sexual abuse, but it could have been possible to consider these two types of child abuse separately). As a consequence there are some limitations as to what can be concluded from this data; however it is still possible to identify some broad patterns within the research.

**Figure 5: Maltreatment Types researched in grey and academic literature**

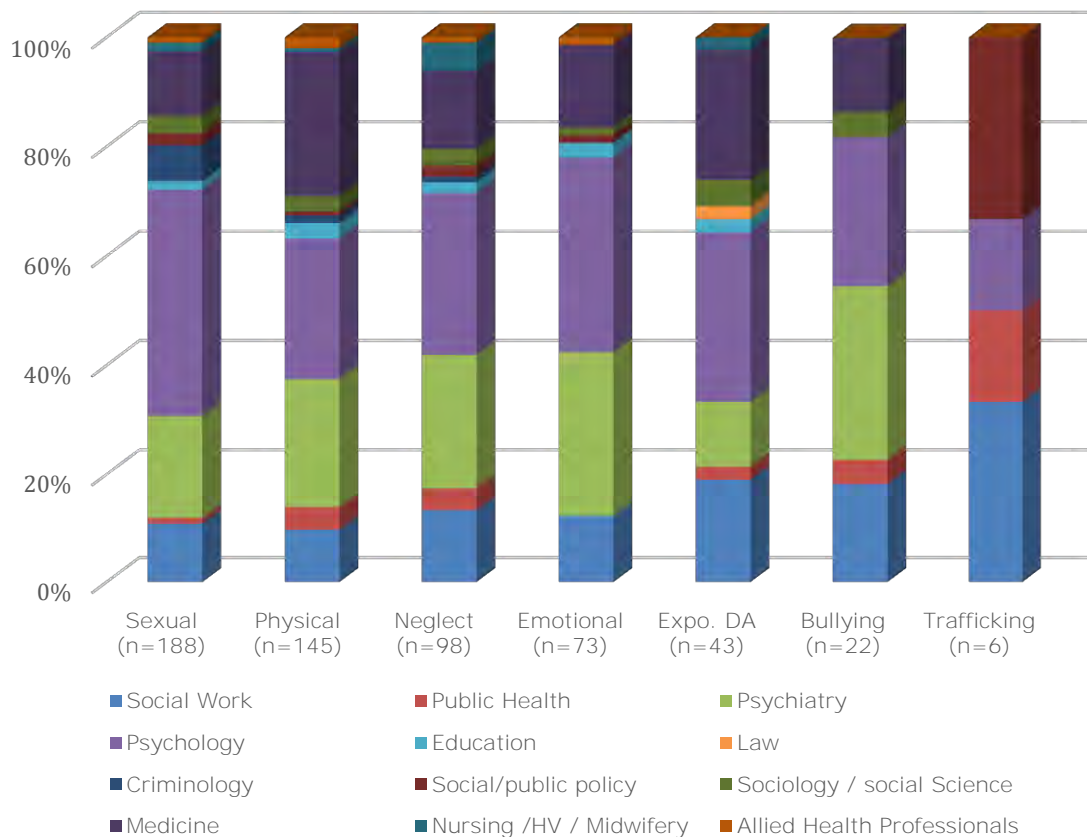


In the academic literature 39% of publications did not specify any particular maltreatment type. When maltreatment type was identified there was often more than one form of abuse that was the subject of the research.

Sexual abuse was the most frequently occurring maltreatment type to be considered in isolation from other forms of abuse with a third of the academic literature considering this subject alone. This compares with 19% of articles focusing solely on physical abuse and 13% of articles on neglect.

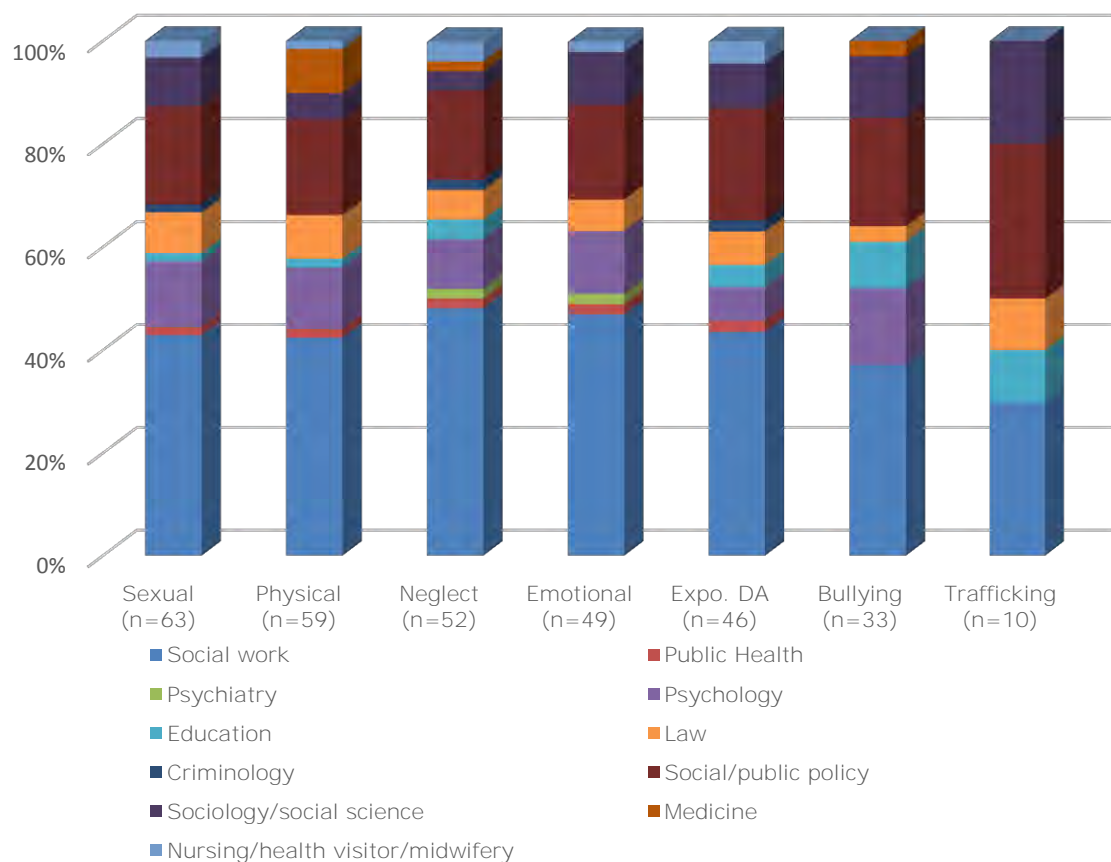
We explored the dataset to identify patterns of first authorship in relation to type of maltreatment. In the academic literature representatives from each of the disciplines coded (apart from law) are represented as first authors in relation to sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect (**see** Figure 6). The highest numbers of publications on sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect were undertaken within psychology, whilst publications dealing with physical abuse were as likely to be published with a first named author from medicine as from psychology.

**Figure 6: Specific maltreatment types and first author of academic paper**



As noted elsewhere, identifying the discipline of first authors in the grey literature was not clear cut. However, Figure 7 shows a broadly similar pattern to the academic literature in as much as most of the disciplines are represented as first authors in relation to most maltreatment types with a narrower range evident in relation to bullying and trafficking. Social work appears more often the first author's **discipline** in the grey literature and education also has greater representation in the grey literature than in the academic one.

**Figure 7: Specific maltreatment types and first author of grey literature**



## Substantive topics in child protection research

The codification system for research topics is explained in appendix 2. The nature of consequences or outcomes in adulthood was the most frequently researched substantive topic in the academic literature (21%) followed by system or practice responses (14%), attitudes and beliefs (11%) and nature of consequences or outcomes in childhood (11%). In relation to the grey literature, system or practice responses (30%) and incidence and prevalence (21%) were also common substantive topics, along with publications concerned with attitudes and beliefs (8%), aetiology of child maltreatment (8%) and children's experiences (8%).

**Table 7: Substantive topics addressed in the research**

Substantive Topics	Academic Literature		Grey Literature	
	n = 467	%	n = 243	%
Aetiology	33	7%	20	8%
Therapeutic interventions in adulthood	2	0.4%	0	0.0%
Therapeutic interventions in childhood	38	8%	11	5%
Preventative interventions	14	3%	17	7%
Children's experiences	29	6%	20	8%
Incidence and prevalence	28	6%	52	21%
Nature of consequences or outcomes in adulthood	101	21%	3	1%
Nature of consequences or outcomes in childhood	55	11%	1	0.4%
Assessment or diagnosis	46	10%	5	2%
System or practice responses to child maltreatment	69	14%	73	30%
Attitudes and beliefs	52	11%	20	8%

## NSPCC priorities covered in the research

We looked at the dataset to identify research that could be linked to the NSPCC research priorities as identified at the time of the review. Caution should be exercised when reporting the exact number of papers focusing on specific groups due to reliance on the way in which research samples are categorised by researchers and it should be noted that some categories may overlap (for example looked after children aged under one); however we can identify some broad patterns. Three of the NSPCC priorities (sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect) were strongly represented in the academic literature. We are not able to specify how much of the research around physical abuse was specific to high risk families (those families where there are violent adults, alcohol and drug misuse and mental health issues). In relation to the remaining four priorities we identified the following instances of academic literature:

- looked after children n=134
- children under the age of one n=14
- looked after children under the age of one n=1
- disabled children n=4 (n=1 of which was concerned with disabled looked after children)
- children from minority ethnic communities n=7 (n=5 of which were concerned with looked after children from minority ethnic communities)



The grey literature shows a similar pattern to the academic literature with neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse being the focus of much attention.

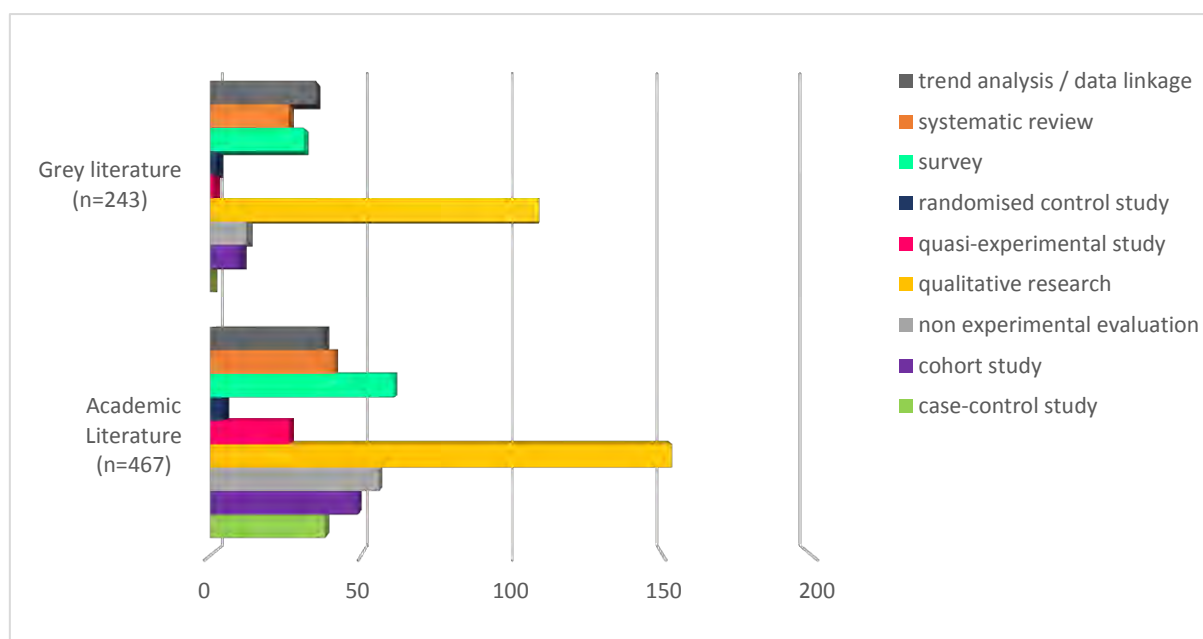
In relation to the remaining four priorities we identified the following instances of grey literature:

- looked after children n=49
- children under the age of one n=1
- disabled children = 6
- children from minority ethnic communities n=10 (n=2 of which were concerned with looked after children from minority ethnic communities)

### 3.2.5 Research question 2e: What research designs have been used?

This section reports the designs used within the studies included in our dataset. Qualitative designs were employed most frequently accounting for a third of academic literature. Surveys were the next most frequently used design (13%), followed by non-experimental evaluations (12%). Figure 8 presents the number of publications within the academic and grey literature datasets utilising the nine different research designs that were coded. The number of randomised controlled trials reported was low in both academic papers (0.9%) and grey literature (0.8%). Six longitudinal studies were reported in the academic literature and three in the grey literature.

**Figure 8: Percentage of publications utilising different research designs in the academic and grey literature datasets**



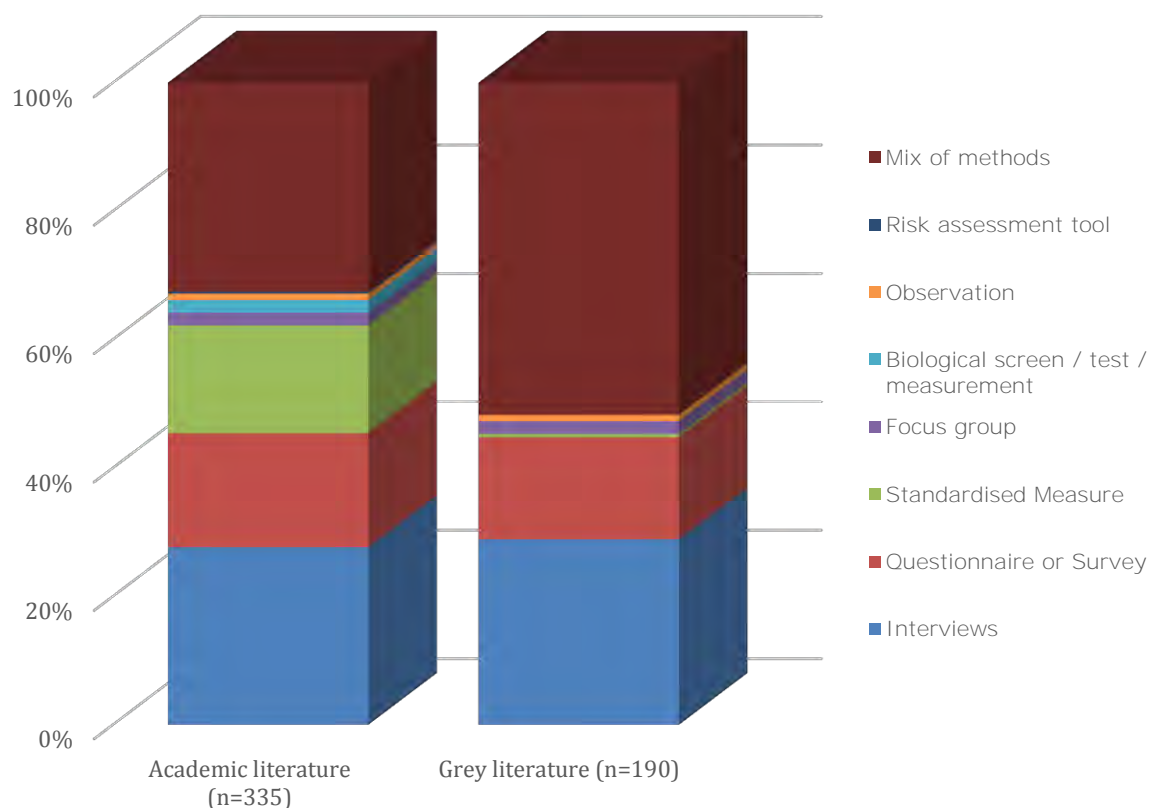
### 3.2.6 Research question 2f: What types of data have been used?

In this section we report the type of data used in the research identified and the data collection methods used.

Ninety percent of academic publications were based on studies, which included the collection of original (primary) data; some used a mix of primary and pre-existing (secondary) data. Of the 243 grey literature studies included in this review (81%) collected primary data.

Three hundred and thirty-six of the 467 publications described studies in which data were collected directly from a research participant. The most common means of obtaining direct data was through interview. Questionnaires or surveys were the next most commonly used method, followed by the use of standardised measures.

**Figure 9: Methods used for obtaining primary data from research participants**



Observational methods, risk assessment tools and biological screening were all much less frequently used. All of these methods were used in less than two per cent of those studies, which took data directly from research participants. Although focus groups were seldom used as the sole method of collecting data directly from research, they were often part of a mixed method approach. A third of the studies taking data directly from research participants used a mix of the above methods.

Nearly half of the grey literature (49.7%) used a mix of data collection methods. The most frequently used method of data collection was interview, used as the sole method of data collection in 40% of studies in the grey literature, as well as in a number of studies using mixed methods. None of the studies used biological screens, tests or measurements and only one collected data using standardised measures.

## Secondary Data

Analysis of secondary data was undertaken in 46 (10%) of the 467 academic publications. National datasets provided a valuable source of secondary data. Eleven different national datasets were mentioned as being used by researchers, the 1958 British Birth Cohort being the most frequently mentioned. There were six publications arising from analyses of data from this dataset. The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) was mentioned in two publications as was the Environmental Risk Longitudinal Twin Study. Other national datasets used included:

- 2010 Young Life and Times Survey
- Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
- Cambridge study in Delinquent Development
- Department of Health Database
- England Census 2001
- Growing up in Scotland

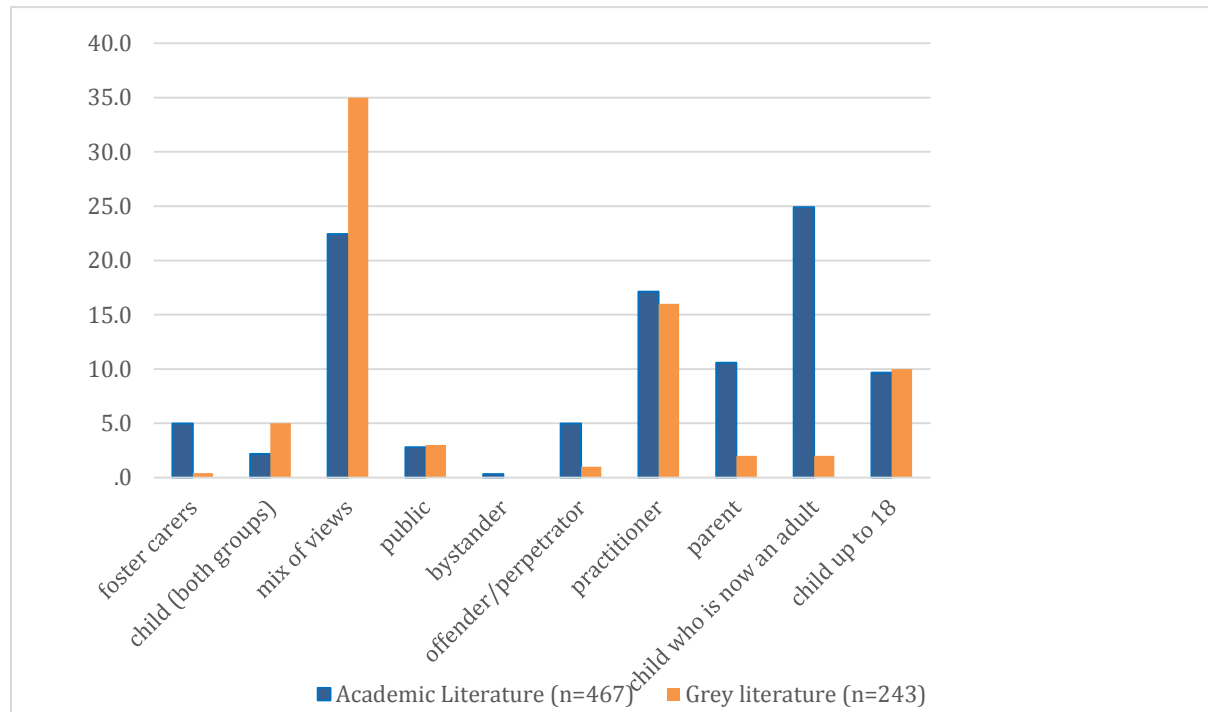
Analysis of secondary data was undertaken in 46 (19%) of the 243 publications in the grey literature. Five of these used national datasets, this included the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (used in two studies), the Millennium Cohort Study (used on one study), the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (used in one study), and the Department for Education SSDA903 Dataset (used in one study).

### 3.2.7 Research question 2g: Whose perspectives have been included?

Where the research reported on the perspectives of participants (on any topic) we recorded the source of the data. The general picture emerging from the dataset is that a large percentage of studies have gathered the perspectives of a range of stakeholders; where the focus has been particular groups this **has been practitioners, children (<18 years), or adults reflecting on their childhood experiences**. The attention paid to these groups differs between the academic and grey literature.

Within the academic literature research that set out to gain information on the perspectives of adults formed 25% of the dataset (closely followed by research reporting a mix of views). The views of practitioners formed the third largest portion of research reporting perspectives. Relatively little data has been collected on the perspectives of children (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Direct views obtained in the academic (n=321) and grey (n=179) literature**



### 3.3 Research question 3: Who funded the research and how much has been allocated?

#### 3.3.1 Phase 1 findings: Academic and grey literature funding

Funding information was acknowledged in 58% of the academic literature and in 67.9% of the grey literature. When funding was acknowledged in the academic literature 15.6% cited more than one funder, the range of funders being between two and nine. When funding was acknowledged in the grey literature 7% cited more than one funder, the range of funders being between one and three.

Seventy one different funders were mentioned in the academic literature. Authors from medicine and psychiatry were the most likely to report receipt of research funds (60% and 69%) respectively. The most frequently mentioned funders in the academic literature were: Medical Research Council; Economic and Social Research Council and Department of Health.

A total of 62 organisations were identified as funders in the grey literature. The most frequently mentioned funders were the Department for Education (DfE) and the NSPCC, with each funding 27 studies. It is not possible to determine which disciplines are more or least likely to receive

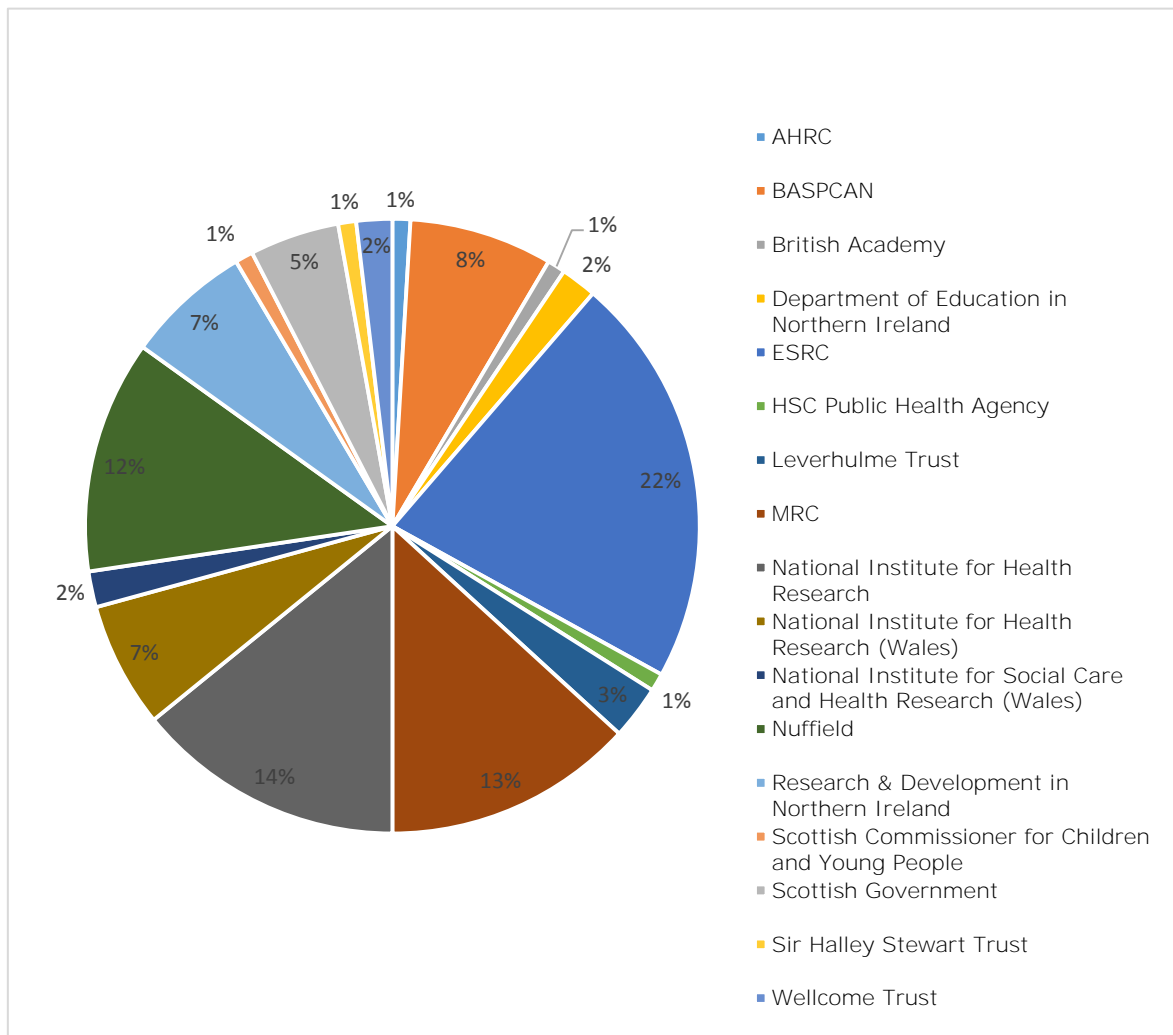
funding for the studies in the grey literature dataset and the discipline of the first author is known for only 96 out of the 243 studies.

### 3.3.2 Phase 2 findings: Funding landscape dataset

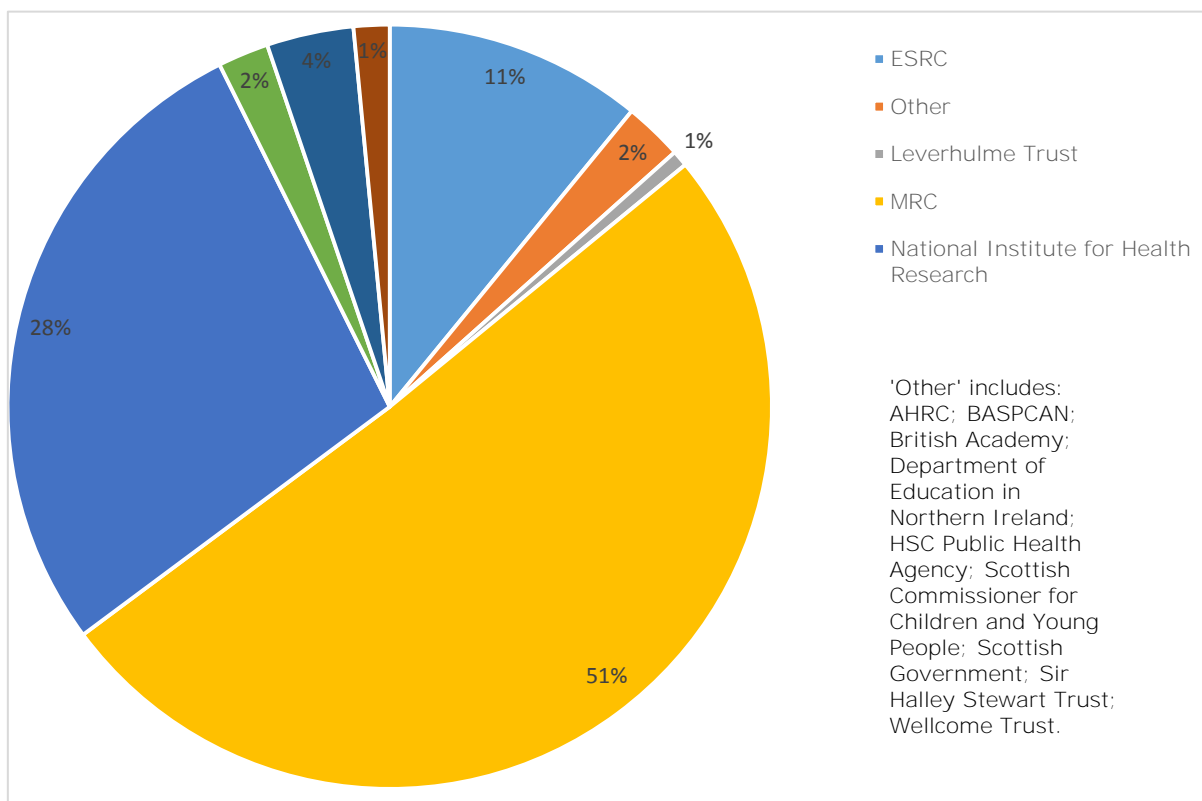
As noted in the methodology, there were few accessible lists on the websites of what research was being, or had been funded by such organisations. This lack of transparency has resulted in an incomplete dataset as funders were only included in it when the information about funding for research in the field of child protection was readily in their website and it included details about the seven codes in the dataset, which were: Title of research project or publication; Principal Investigator; who funded the research; what type of funding (grant, fellowship, indeterminable); total value of the funding; the start date; the end date. This resulted in only a small number of funders being included in the final dataset. It therefore must be emphasised that the following findings can only be taken as an indication of the funding landscape.

The 17 funding organisations included in our **funders'** dataset funded in total 106 studies in the field of child protection with awards made to the total value of approximately £42m over the five years. As illustrated in Figure 11 the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), and the National Institute for Health and Research (NIHR) were the organisation funding the greatest number of research studies in this field. Unsurprisingly, these were also the organisations, which made the greatest financial contribution towards research in this field (Figure 12)

**Figure 11: Proportion of child protection research funded by 17 organisations**



**Figure 12: Proportion of funding by each organisation (total awards approximately £42m)**



It is important to note here that, whilst figure 2 provides an indication of how much funding each organisation has made available to child protection research in the UK between 2010 and 2014, it is likely to be an under representation of the total amount spent in child protection research. This is due to the difficulties in accessing information **from funders' websites** discussed in the methodology section.

It should also be noted that although the MRC, ESRC and NIHR are shown in Figure 2 to have granted a large amount of funding to child protection research in the UK in comparison to other organisations, that this cannot be taken as indicative of these organisations funding priorities as these amounts have not been compared against the total amount of funding these organisations have granted between 2010 and 2014. Therefore whilst the Medical Research Council (MRC) may have given the most amount of funding to child protection research in the UK, this may represent only a very small proportion of their overall funding. In contrast BASPCAN, for instance, may give only a small amount of funds, but this is likely to represent a very large proportion, if not all, of their overall funding available for research.

## 4. DISCUSSION

A summary of key findings is presented next in relation to the key questions that guided this mapping review.

### 4.1 Research question 1: How can child protection research be classified?

#### **Key findings summary:**

This study has resulted in a codification system for research literature on child protection comprising 11 different substantive topics, nine different research designs and seven different maltreatment types.

#### **Discussion:**

There were a number of challenges associated with the task of developing an overview of child protection research across the UK related to searching, retrieving and classifying studies. The availability and accessibility of information was variable. There was also little published guidance on potential dimensions for such a system of classification. That said, this study has resulted in a clear and defensible codification system for research literature on child protection, which can now be adopted, tested and refined.

As far as we are aware, this is the first study to not only systematically search child protection academic research relating to the UK but also to classify and map this. While there are a number of available databases of research relevant to child protection such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE) Social Care Online, Research in Practice, WithScotland and the University of Huddersfield's child protection database, these have some limitations as sources of comprehensive information about child protection research across the UK. For example, Social Care Online includes only selective publications relating to criminal justice yet this field is important in the study of sexual abuse. The process through which these databases are populated is also more systematic in some cases than others, usually related to the resources available. These resources act primarily as repositories for the purposes of research dissemination and knowledge exchange and in doing so offer an important service to users of research and other resources, but do not set out to produce any analyses or maps of these resources in the way this Landscape project has done.



## 4.2 Research question 2: What child protection research has been published between Jan 2010 and Dec 2014?

### Key findings summary:

710 academic and grey literature publications met our inclusion criteria as empirical research undertaken within the four nations of the UK on child protection between 2010 and 2014. Of these, 467 were academic articles and 243 were grey literature. During the search process around 1,489 academic papers on the topic of child protection were excluded, as they did not meet the criterion of being empirical research. The research is published across a large number of journals, some child protection specific and some more generic in focus. Studies were reporting findings from all four UK nations.

### Discussion:

The search process produced around three times as many academic publications that were non-empirical papers than reports of empirical research. The relatively low proportion of empirical studies is a concern. Developing a knowledgebase requires evidence synthesis, theoretical development and methodologically diverse empirical research. Our definition of empirical studies incorporated systematic reviews and meta-syntheses, collection and analysis of primary data, secondary analysis of data and theory testing and inductive theory development within empirical studies. The large number of non-empirical papers are likely to have included non-systematic literature reviews and think pieces as well as purely theoretical papers. Further analysis is required to understand research activity as a whole and contributions to the field. This information is currently not easy to identify due to the lack of a central repository or data base of child protection research. We are aware of the valuable resource provided through the National Register of Clinical Trials and would see value in exploring the feasibility of such a national register for child protection research. This would require high level co-operation of funders to provide some compulsion to researchers to register.

It is notable that the peer-reviewed journals publishing the higher levels of child protection research tended to be those with low impact factors<sup>2</sup>. We are not in a position to explain this finding from the work we have done but can speculate on some potential explanations. These low impact journals are known to focus on policy and practice implications of research. Researchers publishing in such journals may have prioritised communicating the application of the research over the academic content in order to ensure that their research was used to benefit children. Non-academic impact of research has gained increased importance within academia and academics are likely to be mindful of this. It may also be the case that higher impact, non-specialist journals do not welcome research on UK child protection though we have no evidence to support such a statement. Finally, we must be open to the possibility that publishing in such journals suggests that poorer quality research is being undertaken in the field of child protection than in other substantive topics. If this were the case it could have implications for practice, for example, if practitioners were selectively using low quality studies

<sup>2</sup> The impact factor of a journal is a measure of the average number of times papers from that publication are referenced in other journals and is one indication of the influence of research contained within the journal.

with limited generalisability on which to base practice decisions. This also points to a further need in relation to child protection research, that is, to ensure that those in the field are research literate.

#### 4.2.1 Research question 2a: What proportion of the published research was undertaken within academia?

##### **Key findings summary:**

The first author in around three quarters of academic publications was affiliated to a university with the remainder affiliated to another organisation such as clinical departments in the health service. In the case of grey literature, a smaller proportion, that is around two fifths of first authors, were affiliated to universities and three fifths of first authors were affiliated to other organisations.

##### **Discussion:**

The figures suggest that the boundaries between academia and non academic settings are fluid. A substantial minority of first authors of academic papers were affiliated to organisations other than a university. Given the need for applied research in order to address the public problem of child maltreatment, we suggest this fluidity may be helpful and should even be further encouraged. The pattern of grey literature suggests that there is already co-operation between public and third sector organisations and the academy and that these relationships can be built upon. Such collaborations fit well with academic researchers' agenda around non-academic impact of research. This review did not judge the quality of research outputs but we would suggest that maintaining or improving the quality of research should also be embedded as a principle within academic and non-academic collaboration.

#### 4.2.2 Research question 2b: Who undertakes child protection research in the UK

##### **Key findings summary:**

Research activity in the field of child protection in the UK is widely distributed across a total of 120 different academic institutions and 106 non-academic organisations. A small number of universities appear to be particularly research active in this field based on the frequency of academic publications. These are Kings College London, University College London, University of Bristol, University of Central Lancashire and University of East Anglia, University of Edinburgh, Cardiff University and Queens University Belfast.

##### **Discussion:**

It is interesting to note that at least one child protection research active university is located in each of the four UK nations. This is likely to be increasingly important if the current agenda of devolution continues to gather pace. This offers both opportunities and challenges in terms of comparative analysis of child protection policy and practice within the four nations and co-ordination of a child protection research agenda across a diverse landscape.

It is also interesting to note that higher rates of child protection research activity were evident in universities where NSPCC had invested, for example, through the funding of research fellows, programmes or centres. While we cannot establish a direct relationship between investment and outputs, we would speculate that such an investment could have a number of positive effects including building individual and organisational capacity to undertake child protection research and making child protection visible on the research agenda. Funding of programmes and centres can also create a critical mass of expertise that can be exploited.

### 4.2.3 Research question 2c: In which disciplines was the research undertaken?

#### Key findings summary:

The analysis of the academic discipline of the first named authors revealed thirteen distinct disciplines undertaking child protection research in the UK. Around three quarters of this research was undertaken by first authors from the disciplines of psychology (28%), medicine (14%), social work (14%) and psychiatry (12%). Information about the discipline of the first author was available for 96 of the 173 first named authors in our grey literature dataset. Of these, the most common discipline was social work (34%), followed by social and public policy (18%) and psychology (12%).

Collaborative research was common, whether monodisciplinary<sup>3</sup> or multidisciplinary in nature. Collaborations between psychologists and psychiatrists were among the most common with these individuals often working within the same research centres. There were also collaborations, in a significant minority of cases, with researchers from North America, elsewhere in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, usually involving academics from psychiatry. Some disciplines appear to be less active producers of academic outputs such as law, allied health professionals, criminology and education.

#### Discussion:

Discipline was difficult to categorise. Three sources of information were consulted and sometimes combined to determine the discipline of an author including departmental affiliation **declared on a paper, qualifications of an author and information on academics' webpages.** It appears that there can be some fluidity in disciplinary group, for example, academics may present themselves differently to different audiences such as funders or end users and may move across disciplinary boundaries as their career progresses. Taking this into account, it appears that multidisciplinary is common. This is to be welcomed given the complex nature of child protection and need for co-operative action across a number of agencies. It does though raise questions about how to encourage and co-ordinate such multidisciplinary. We noted that psychiatrists and psychologists often collaborated and that such collaborators were often within the same research centre. Co-location of multiple disciplines may, therefore, be one way to encourage multidisciplinary. Calls for proposals could also encourage multidisciplinary. Research Councils for example have encouraged such cross-council and, therefore, cross-discipline collaboration through large programmes focusing on a specific topic such as 'New

<sup>3</sup> Monodisciplinary refers to research undertaken by a single discipline regardless of the number of individuals involved

**Dynamics of Ageing’.** The monodisciplinary or multi-disciplinary nature of academic journals is also an important part of infrastructure to support collaboration. We recently experienced outright rejection of a paper concerning disabled children and child protection from a leading social work journal, not on the basis of quality, but because it was not adequately focused on social work issues *per se*.

Collaborations with non-UK researchers are also to be welcomed where they add value to UK studies and encourage innovative thinking in relation to policy and practice. Overseas exchanges, visiting fellow schemes and international funding calls could also be used to encourage more such international collaborations. We also suggest that there is value in bringing together academic and non-academic communities to develop agendas for action.

#### 4.2.4 Research question 2d: On what aspects of child protection has the research focused?

##### **Key findings summary:**

In the academic literature 39% of publications did not specify any particular maltreatment type. When type of maltreatment was identified there was often more than one form of abuse that was the subject of the research. Sexual abuse was the most frequently occurring type of maltreatment to be considered in isolation from other forms of abuse with a third of the academic literature considering this subject alone. This compares with 19% of articles focusing solely on physical abuse and 13% of articles on neglect. Trafficking is the least mentioned type of abuse.

The codification system for research topics is explained in appendix 2. The nature of consequences or outcomes in adulthood was the most frequently researched substantive topic in the academic literature (21%) followed by system or practice responses (14%), attitudes and beliefs (11%) and nature of consequences or outcomes in childhood (11%). In relation to the grey literature, system or practice responses (30%) and incidence and prevalence (21%) were also common substantive topics, along with publications concerned with attitudes and beliefs (8%), aetiology of child maltreatment (8%) **and children’s experiences (8%)**. Very little academic and grey literature on children under one, black and minority ethnic children and children with disabilities was published between 2010 and 2014.

##### **Discussion:**

Child maltreatment and the various manifestations of this, such as physical abuse or neglect, are conceptualised in various ways in research outputs. This makes codification difficult. In addition, in some outputs there is no explicit definition of abuse or neglect given and instead the nature of the abuse, which is the focus of the research is embedded in the narrative of the paper or remains undefined. This has implications for any repetition of the mapping exercise we have undertaken and also creates challenges with regard to the synthesis of evidence (Taylor et al 2012).

The topics or substantive focus of the research proved to be the most difficult aspect of research to classify and an extended process was needed to establish reliability of the codification system. It appears that there is disproportionate emphasis on some topics in comparison to others. For example, in the academic literature there are almost twice as many studies of the consequences of child abuse in adulthood than there are studies of the consequences of child abuse during childhood. While the long term effects of child abuse is an important topic of study, the more immediate impacts on a child are also important. There is also much greater emphasis on response to than prevention of child abuse. More analysis is needed to identify possible barriers to addressing certain aspects of child protection research either due to methodological challenges or ethical sensitivities.

#### 4.2.5 Research question 2e: What research designs have been used?

##### **Key findings summary:**

A qualitative design was the most commonly employed in the academic literature (33%). This varied across discipline with only 8% of studies in medicine having a qualitative design compared to over half of studies from social work, law, sociology, social science and nursing. Surveys were the next most utilised design (13%) followed by non-experimental evaluations (12%) and cohort studies (11%). Randomised controlled trials were reported in 0.9% of academic papers.

Almost half (45%) of studies in the grey literature use a qualitative design. Very few studies were randomised controlled trials (0.8%) or quasi-experimental (0.4%). It was not fully possible to classify the type of research design adopted by studies in 10% of the grey literature. **This may reflect the author's intention to tailor the publication for a non-academic audience.**

##### **Discussion:**

We would suggest some core principles that should guide knowledge production and transfer in order to promote a child protection agenda. These include:

- An iterative approach to the development of an evidence base rather than a progression from qualitative to quantitative research.
- Methodological diversity in child protection research practice.
- **Engagement with a range of 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions about child protection that are pursued through appropriate methods.**
- Multi-disciplinary thinking to tackle a multi-agency problem.
- Above all, a commitment to action-oriented research, that is, an imperative to spell out the practical implications of research (not just develop knowledge or build theory) and to focus on barriers to change.

It appears that there is a lack of methodological diversity in the field, with qualitative studies dominating. There were few examples of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) reported, consistent with the picture of low numbers of studies focusing on interventions. While these are methodologically and ethically challenging in such a complex and sensitive field of research, we feel there is more scope to adopt this methodology to contribute to evidence-based policy and practice. We are aware that NSPCC is currently funding a number of RCTs that have not yet

fully published and if this mapping review is repeated, the frequency of publications reporting RCTs will increase. Another gap in terms of methodology is the lack of longitudinal studies. Funders can be reluctant to commit resources to such studies. They are vital, however, to the preventive agenda within child protection, for example, through the use of prospective studies to identify causal relationships between risks and outcomes.

There are a small number of examples, within the US, of attempts to develop a national overview of knowledge production in relation to child protection. For example, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) was commissioned by the US Department of Health and Human Services to undertake a consensus study of research on child abuse and neglect and to recommend research priorities for the next decade (<http://www.iom.edu/Activities/Children/ChildMaltreatment.aspx>). IOM is an independent, non-profit organisation established to support those in government and the private sector to make informed decisions about health and health care. Its activities bring together experts and stakeholders to work together through forums, committees and reviews of evidence. A report produced by the expert committee has been published (Peterson et al 2013) as well as other outputs from workshops and meetings. The report recommends a framework for future child abuse and neglect research and calls for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to child abuse and neglect research.

#### 4.2.6 Research question 2f: What types of data have been used?

##### **Key findings summary:**

Ninety per cent of academic publications reported findings from primary research. Seventy two percent of publications collated data from participants. A wide range of methods were used to gather this data. Interviews were the most frequent method used, followed by questionnaires and standardised measures (such as the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire). Biological tests and observational methods were the least frequent method.

Thirty eight per cent of academic publications analysed documentary data (e.g. hospital case records) or data from a national data set (e.g. 1958 British Birth Cohort). Many studies used a mix of documentary analysis and the collation of data from participants. A quarter of studies using documentary data were systematic reviews.

In the grey literature data set 81% of publications reported findings from the collation of original data and 74% collected data from participants. The most frequent methods of collecting data were interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. Many of these studies (42%) also collected data from participants. One study (carried out by the NSPCC) used a standardised measure. Biological tests and observational methods were not used.

In the grey literature of the 45% that analysed documentary data 33% were qualitative studies and 19% were systematic reviews.

## Discussion:

It is important that research is led by compelling questions rather than what forms of data are accessible; preferred methodological approaches; or short term gain at the expense of answering more difficult longitudinal questions. Further analysis would be needed to comment on the fit between research questions, data types and study designs. It would also be valuable to speak to researchers about the challenges of accessing certain types of data and how barriers can be removed.

### 4.2.7 Research question 2g: Whose perspectives have been included?

#### Key findings summary:

Direct views were taken in 69% of all the studies reported by the academic literature. In 25% of these studies the views of adult survivors of abuse were taken, while 17% of studies took the views of practitioners. Twenty-two percent reported a mix of views; 5% the views of perpetrators, 5% the views of foster carers and 3% the views of the public.

Direct views were taken in 73% of studies in the grey literature. Most of these (48%) took the views of more than one group of participants; whilst 21% took the direct views only of practitioners and 13% only of children up to the age of 18. Very few studies focused exclusively on the views of offenders or perpetrators (1%) or foster carers (0.4%).

## Discussion:

Gathering data from vulnerable children and families and non-professional carers of looked after children inevitably raises complex ethical issues that can lead to barriers for researchers attempting to access the views and experiences of excluded social groups. This may account for the relatively low number of studies reported in academic journals that took views directly from children under the age of 18. This suggests a need to ensure that ethical guidelines and procedures relating to child protection research are under continuous review and development and also that this is communicated to gatekeepers in order to reassure them.

It is interesting to note that research published as grey literature was more likely to include the views of children under the age of 18. This may reflect researchers facing fewer barriers from gatekeepers as research commissioned by a service provider sometimes allows easier access to specific participant groups. While this sort of collaborative and facilitative arrangement is to be welcomed, it may be the case that less formal scrutiny of ethical issues was expected. Research ethics guidance varies and the stringent requirements from the NHS or NSPCC or particular university departments may not be universally applied. While we would not like to suggest that this necessarily equates with poor ethical practices, it may constitute a potential area of future development.



### 4.3 Research question 3: Who funded the research & how much money has been allocated to the research?

#### **Key findings summary:**

Funding sources were reported in 58% of the academic literature and in 67.9% of the grey literature. Over 70 different funders were mentioned in the academic literature alone. The most frequently mentioned funders were: Medical Research Council; Economic and Social Research Council; Department of Health.

A total of 62 organisations were identified as funders in the grey literature. The most frequently mentioned funders were the Department for Education (DfE) and the NSPCC, with each funding 27 studies.

Additional work was undertaken to identify funding amounts. Due to many difficulties in gathering this information, only 17 organisations were included in the final funders dataset. These organisations funded awards to the approximate total value of £42M over the five years.

#### **Discussion:**

The findings regarding funding of child protection research should be treated with caution. Funding sources were reported by authors in a minority of cases and the transparency and usability of funding information available from funders was variable.

In some cases we could not determine whether funding was specifically for research or more precisely for child protection research. Some examples of good practice include the Wellcome Trust, which allows online downloads of their funding information by year, and the UK research councils have an accessible and easy to use online tool that allows searches of all publications and projects funded by them to be carried out using different strategies, such as year and/or type of publication. This greater transparency about funding would be helpful in providing a fuller understanding of how diminishing resources can be best used in future.

Another possible route for finding out information about what is being funded and the amount of funding being made available to child protection research in the UK would be to submit Freedom of Information (FoI) requests to public sector organisations. This may produce a higher number of responses than personal communications as public organisations must respond to FoI requests within 20 days of receiving the request – although public organisations can decline to provide such information if it is deemed to be sensitive or if the costs of gathering it are too high. We would also be reliant on their determination of what constituted relevant child protection research. A more collaborative approach to gathering such data would be preferable.

The data do, though, illustrate some interesting issues. There are a large number of organisations funding child protection research including Research Councils, large charitable organisations, national and local government departments and the NHS. We particularly



welcome the funding given by multiple Research Councils as acknowledgement of the importance of the topic and the need to address it from a number of disciplinary perspectives.

The broad range of organisations funding child protection research is to be welcomed, this may result in some challenges in relation to creating a co-ordinated effort to better understand the problem of child maltreatment and protection. We would encourage more national debate around research priorities in this area.

Mention should also be made here of the impact of expectations regarding Full Economic Costing (FEC) on awards. Research Council awards to undertake research are inclusive of FEC, which provide the full economic cost of a project and pay a fixed percentage of 80% of this sum (the institute pays the remaining 20%), which includes an attribution of the cost of academic staff time, and the institution's facilities, estates and indirect costs. This helps institutions to understand the full costs of the research they carry out and supports their research activities on a sustainable basis, with appropriate investment in research infrastructure, including buildings, facilities, and staff. However, charities and non-governmental agency awards do not always reflect FEC and acceptance of non-FEC awards is at the discretion of each institution, resulting in many academics affiliated with a university being unable to apply for funding from non-governmental agencies.

## 4.4 Conclusion

It is clear that there would be value in developing a more co-ordinated strategic approach to ensure that scarce resources are used to maximum benefit in order to tackle child maltreatment. This could include a programmatic approach to the commissioning of research and the promotion of a multi-disciplinary clusters model to create opportunities for critical mass and added value as opposed to a more ad hoc approach.

A Child Protection Observatory or similar could provide a number of useful functions including coordination and facilitation of academic collaborations (e.g. mapping expertise and outputs), promoting quality in a wide range of methodologies and building expertise in research with vulnerable children, disseminating research and promoting knowledge exchange, creating and curating impact and also developing new studies or programmes of research.

In relation to the database of publications and funders that we have generated through our searching and classification process, we would like to build on this work in a number of ways.

These include:

- Generating a number of key research questions, in collaboration with NSPCC, and undertaking systematic reviews of evidence relating to these questions.
- A more critical analysis of methodological approaches currently employed within UK child protection research.
- Establishing the overlap between this data set and REF outputs submitted in 2014.
- Identification of child protection-related impact case-studies which could also be subjected to analysis.

This mapping review has shown that child protection research activity is distributed across a wide range of disciplines and organisations, nonetheless, there are many examples of collaboration across a diverse range of academic disciplines, public and third sector organisations. Such diversity and collaboration in research is to be welcomed and further encouraged. We have shown that there are methodological and substantive gaps to be filled and areas where evidence about particular maltreatment types or vulnerable groups is patchy. The findings of the mapping review, together with the development of further analysis of the existing datasets should greatly contribute to the better co-ordination of future research within the field of child protection.

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## 6. APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Methods

This mapping review comprised the following stages:

### Phase I – Exploratory stage

- (a) Systematic search and analysis of literature using predefined search engines and bibliographic databases.
- (b) Development and piloting of a classification/codification framework for the literature.
- (c) Identification of organisations undertaking child protection research and collation of grey literature.

### Phase II – Creation of dataset of codified research outputs

- (a) Entry and analysis of data from academic literature on child protection research using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.
- (b) Entry and analysis of data from grey literature on child protection research using SPSS.
- (c) Entry of data from funders' webpages onto shortened SPSS file.

### Phase I (a) Systematic search and analysis of child protection literature using data bases.

The University of Edinburgh search engine *Searcher* was used to locate the academic literature as it enables a concurrent search of multiple databases. The team worked closely with academic support Librarians in agreeing use of software for the screening and storage of a publications database (from *Searcher* to *EndNote*). In most instances *Searcher* provides easy access to the full text of a document. *Searcher* extracts references from over 94 databases/sources. Full information about *Searcher* can be found here: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/library-museum-gallery/finding-resources/library-databases/searcher-about>

The databases concurrently searched by *Searcher* include:

- Social Sciences Citation Index
- Science Citation Index
- ERIC
- SocINDEX with full text
- MEDLINE with full text
- CINAHL Plus
- Science Direct
- PsychARTICLES
- Uni of Edinburgh library catalogue
- British Library ETHOS
- JSTOR
- HeinOnline
- Anthropology Plus
- Cochrane Data base of systematic reviews

A separate search was also made of the ASSIA database (applied social sciences index and abstracts) as this is not included in *Searcher*, but was thought to be a likely source of relevant research publications.

## Search Terms

In the initial period of the study the following search terms were used:

(child\* or infant or baby or babies or teenage\* or adolescen\* or young)

AND (abuse or neglect or maltreat\* or exploit\* or bulli\* or bully)

AND (Britain or British or Kingdom or Scot\* or Welsh or Wales or Ireland or Irish)

The search term 'Engl\*' was removed as all articles published in *English* were attracted through the inclusion of this term.

After internal revision of the specificity and sensitivity of the publications captured by these terms they were broadened to include "child protection", adopt\*, foster\* as presented next:

Child\* or infant or baby or babies or teenage\* or adolescen\* or young

abuse or neglect or maltreat\* or exploit\* or bulli\* or bully or "child protection" or adopt\* or foster\*

Britain or British or Kingdom or Scot\* or Welsh or Wales or Ireland or Irish

Only publications written in English were reviewed. The literature included in the dataset is for the period January, 2010 through December, 2014.

*Searcher* returned in excess of 25,000 hits using the search terms but many of these were news articles and some were books or magazines. Limiting the results to academic journal articles reduced this to 10,308 returns over the five year period. Books and monographs were excluded: not all are available electronically and it is not practicable to request interlibrary loans for the purpose of screening, whether a book, or at least one chapter in a book, reports UK child protection research. Further, most such research would also be reported in at least one journal article and would be captured by this means.

All of the grey literature publications were published and freely available on line. Theses were excluded for two reasons. First, the main resource for this review was the NSPCC library, which does not include thesis information. The second was pragmatic, as there was no time to obtain, read and code multiple theses. We would hope though that useful research in dissertations and theses would have been published in journals and thus captured within the academic literature.

When *Searcher* was asked to remove exact duplicates (the same article often being accessed via more than one database) this removed 63% of the remaining returns – bringing the total for screening down to 6,510 articles. A high number of duplicates are to be expected as *Searcher* scans multiple databases and many journals are traceable on more than one database.

## Inclusion/exclusion criteria



A pilot 50 articles from the period January to June, 2014 formed the focus for inclusion criteria. For the purposes of this study it was the publication date, rather than the dates of when the research was conducted, which formed the criteria on which to determine a fit within the five year period under review.

### ***Undertaken within the four nations of the United Kingdom***

A publication was included when at least some of the data was from the one of the nations of the United Kingdom and at least one of the authors was affiliated with a UK institution.

### ***Child Protection***

Child protection includes protection against all forms of harm perpetrated against children and young people whether from caregivers and adults or from other children and young people. Empirical research into all key types of child maltreatment of children within the United Kingdom were therefore included. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, exposure to domestic abuse, neglect, bullying, cyber-crimes against children and female genital mutilation. See Appendix 2.

Given that the majority of the children who become looked after by the state do so as a result of child protection issues (DfE 2014), we included literature concerning looked after children in the search.

Around 92,000 children in the UK were looked after by the state in 2014 (<http://www.baaf.org.uk/res/statuk>). As of 31 March 2014 there were 68,840 looked after children in England alone with 30,430 children entering care in this period. The majority of these looked after children – 62% in 2014 - were provided with a service due to abuse or neglect. Other reasons recorded for entry into care included family dysfunction, parental illness or disability, family in acute stress, absent parenting, low income, socially unacceptable behaviour and the child's disability.

However, research on self-harm, suicide, or substance misuse by children was not included unless this was placed within the context of research on child maltreatment.

### ***Research***

In order to be included in the dataset, the publications had to report empirical research into child protection. That is, it either had to report findings from the analysis of original data collected as part of the research project or report an original analysis of existing data. Where the research reported a review of the literature on a specific topic, this was included if the review was systematic but not included when there was insufficient information on the research strategy to enable it to be replicated by another researcher. Thus systematic reviews and some integrative or narrative reviews could be included, but only where methods were described

sufficiently to be replicable. Meta-analyses were included unless it was clear that none of the studies making up the study utilised UK data.

Each article returned on *Searcher* was subjected to an initial screen (screen one) to see if it met the inclusion criteria, Articles **available 'early online' within some academic journals are not** returned consistently by all *Searcher's* databases. We therefore only included articles available in final print copy.

Articles not screened out at this stage were transferred to *EndNote* software for a second **screening based on a review of the paper's abstract and method section. Where the paper was** found to meet the inclusion criteria, it was coded onto the SPSS dataset.

Articles were screened first on the basis of whether there was a UK based author and if so, the second consideration was whether it had a child protection focus. Where this was the case, the next check was whether there was any UK data collated by the researchers (or the subject of a secondary review by the researchers. Papers were excluded on the basis of the first observed exclusion criteria using this approach.

At the end of the search for each six month period, an additional search was made of the ASSIA database using the same search terms. This resulted in between one and six additional articles for each six month period.

Across the 60 month period, the majority of articles excluded were because there was no UK author or UK data (n=4,341), for example Camuso and Rellini (2010). The next highest number were excluded as they were not reporting on research, but rather theoretical or opinion pieces or a note of conference proceedings or a research abstract only (n=1,488), for example Cousins (2013). The remaining exclusions were due to not being on a topic related to child protection (n=1,162): for example Cunningham et al (2011). A significant number of these were on substance misuse and had been picked up by *Searcher* because of the use of the search term '**abuse**' (key words erroneously labelling misuse of substances as substance abuse).

Because the screening and coding was undertaken in six month time blocks, a further 481 duplicates were screened out by *EndNote*, having being sent there from *Searcher*. Different cataloguing speeds across different databases are likely to account for the anomaly that some articles were captured by our search within more than one time frame, i.e. publications became searchable across different databases at slightly different times.

Three reviewers undertook independent screening and coding of articles. Ten per cent of all **papers coded or rejected for not falling into the categories of 'child protection' or 'research'** were checked by a second reviewer to ensure consistency between reviewers.

Prior to the start of screening for literature, all reviewers took part in two exercises based on a sample of 50 articles from 2014. The first exercise involved deciding whether the article should be included and, if not, the basis for the exclusion. The second exercise involved the actual coding those articles to be included onto an SPSS database. In respect of the first of these

exercises the 50 articles were divided into two lots of 30 and 20. The two reviewers were in agreement in respect of 90% of the first 30 articles. After discussion agreement was reached concerning the three remaining papers and a decision not to include conceptual pieces (as opposed to empirical research), was agreed. In respect of the second 20 papers, the two reviewers were in agreement on all papers. These second 20 papers were later used as a pilot for the draft coding framework.

## Appendix Two: Development and pilot of the classification/codification framework for the literature

The development of a system of classification focused firmly on the research questions. This resulted in the creation of a SPSS dataset with 85 fields, each capturing a different piece of information about the research or publication. This framework was also piloted using the papers that were screened as inclusion articles from the pilot 50 papers used for a test of the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

### Who is undertaking child protection research, Where? (Fields 1-26)

In addition to assigning a unique identifying number and recording the title, the first 26 SPSS fields capture data on *who* is doing the research, *where*. Information was captured on the first named author (as well as the first named UK author where this was different), along with the affiliating institution and academic discipline (where this could be determined).

Also included in this subset of the fields is information on whether the research was an international collaboration, as well as the UK nation/s of the data and whether any of the data used was from outside the UK (and if so, where).

### Topics within child protection research (Fields 27-42).

Fields 27-42 of the SPSS dataset collated information on what was the research focus. As well as recording the type or types of maltreatment considered, these fields recorded the age or ages of children who were in focus as well as whether the research addressed any NSPCC priority areas as outlined in the current strategy to 2016 (babies, disabled children, children in ethnic communities, children in care). The other three NSPCC priorities (sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect) were captured by the fields on maltreatment type.

We reduced the range of topics considered within child protection research across all academic disciplines down to a limited number of mutually **exclusive 'topics'**. Seventeen final codes proved sufficient for the first 105 child protection articles coded.

### Research methods in child protection research in the UK (fields 43-69)

Because this study explored the landscape of child protection research within the UK, rather than all child protection literature published within the UK, the methods used by the researchers was key. Fields 43-69 of the SPSS dataset captured information on the types of data collated by the researchers (or used as the basis of the analysis where it was for secondary analysis), as well details of whose perspectives were captured by the research (such as children, parent, practitioner, perpetrator, bystander, member of the public).

Methods by which the data was obtained included biological screen/test/measure, standardised measure, interview, survey, focus group, observation and risk assessment tool.

### **Research design in child protection research in the UK (fields 70-71)**

Field 70 of the dataset, 'design' is a key field in the framework for coding child protection research. The typology of research design used was taken from Pettigrew and Roberts (2003), whose paper breaks research design into eight types and discusses the appropriateness of these for addressing different kinds of research questions. This typology was itself adapted from Muir Gray, (1996).

The eight types of research design captured were: 'qualitative research,' 'survey,' 'case-control study,' 'cohort study,' 'randomised controlled study,' 'quasi experimental studies,' 'non-experimental evaluation' and 'systematic review.' One further type was added - 'trend analysis/data linkage.'

Field 71 of the dataset enabled additional information to be captured in respect of research that used a qualitative design, for example ethnography or phenomenology.

### **Funding of child protection research in the UK (field 72-85)**

An important aspect of the landscape of child protection research within the UK is the source of funding that enables that research to be undertaken. Thirteen fields in total were dedicated to recording this information as it was not uncommon for there to be multiple funders. The SPSS dataset recorded details of the first, second and third named funders, including type of funding (grant or fellowship) and funder's reference number, where given. Although the dataset had the capacity to capture the amount of any funding where this was provided, no academic publication actually gave this information.

**Table 8: Substantive topics in child protection research**

Substantive topics in Child Protection Research (with examples)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Aetiology:</b> This category covers research concerned with the causes and conditions contributing to maltreatment. It includes studies of risk factors, characteristics of perpetrators, victims or situational factors and protective factors. E.g. Yates, P., Allardyce, S. and MacQueen, S. (2012) Children who display harmful sexual behaviour: Assessing the risks of boys abusing at home, in the community or across both settings. <i>Journal of Sexual Aggression</i>, 18(1), pp. 23-35.</li> <li>2. <b>Therapeutic interventions in childhood:</b> This category covers research on the experience of delivering or receiving interventions directed at children and designed to address the consequences of child maltreatment, or the effectiveness of these interventions. These are typically therapeutic interventions. E.g. Kirton, D. and Thomas, C. (2011) A suitable case? Implementing multidimensional treatment foster care in an English local authority. <i>Adoption &amp; Fostering</i>, (2), pp. 5.</li> <li>3. <b>Therapeutic interventions in adulthood:</b> This category covers research on the experience of delivering or receiving interventions directed at individuals and designed to address the consequences of child maltreatment when a survivor reaches adulthood, or the effectiveness of these interventions. These are typically therapeutic interventions. e.g. Valerio, P. and Lepper, G. (2010) Change and Process in Short and Long-term Groups for Survivors of Sexual Abuse. <i>Group Analysis</i>, 43(1), pp. 31-49.</li> <li>4. <b>Preventative interventions:</b> research into an intervention intended to prevent child maltreatment. e.g. Barron, I. G. and Topping, K. J. (2011) Sexual abuse prevention programme fidelity: video analysis of interactions. <i>Child Abuse Review</i>, 20(2), pp. 134-151.</li> <li>5. <b>Children's experiences:</b> This category covers research which has as its focus children's experiences of maltreatment or help seeking including the experiences of siblings and peers within the child's circle. e.g. van Gijn, E. L. and Lamb, M. E. (2013) Alleged Sex Abuse Victims' Accounts of Their Abusers' Modus Operandi. <i>Journal of Forensic Social Work</i>, 3(2), pp. 133 – 149.</li> <li>6. <b>Incidence and prevalence:</b> This category covers research focusing on the incidence or prevalence of child maltreatment in the population and the nature of the abuse. E.g. Bebbington, P., Jonas, S., Brugha, T., Meltzer, H., Jenkins, R., Cooper, C., King, M. and McManus, S. (2011) Child sexual abuse reported by an English national sample: characteristics and demography. <i>Social Psychiatry &amp; Psychiatric Epidemiology</i>, 46(3), pp. 255-262.</li> <li>7. <b>Nature of consequences or outcomes of child maltreatment in childhood:</b> This category covers research that reports links between previous maltreatment and negative consequences during childhood and adolescence. This might be low educational attainment or substance abuse for example. E.g. Kumsta, R., Sonuga-Barke, E. and Rutter, M. (2012) Adolescent callous-unemotional traits and conduct disorder in adoptees exposed to severe early deprivation. <i>The British Journal Of Psychiatry: The Journal Of Mental Science</i>, 200(3), pp. 197-201.</li> <li>8. <b>Nature of consequences or outcomes of child maltreatment in adulthood:</b> This category covers research that reports links to certain outcomes in adulthood with previous childhood maltreatment. This</li> </ol>

could be a health outcome (physical or mental) or substance abuse, poverty etc. e.g. Cadman, L., Waller, J., Ashdown-Barr, L. and Szarewski, A. (2012) Barriers to cervical screening in women who have experienced sexual abuse: an exploratory study. *Journal of Family Planning & Reproductive Health Care*, 38(4), pp. 214-220.

9. **Assessment/diagnosis:** This category covers research concerned with the development, use and effectiveness of professional (usually medical and psychological) procedures to assess the effects of maltreatment on individuals or accurately diagnose maltreatment. .e.g. Leung, R. S., Fairhurst, J., Johnson, K., Landes, C., Moon, L., Sprigg, A. and Offiah, A. C. (2011) Teleradiology: A modern approach to diagnosis, training, and research in child abuse? *Clinical Radiology*, 66(6), pp. 546-550.
10. **System/practice responses to child maltreatment:** This category covers for research into standard system responses (social work practice, legal system etc) to child maltreatment as opposed to a specific intervention or treatment. e.g. Adeniji, A. A., Purcell, A., Pearson, L., Antcliffe, J. M., Tutty, S., Sinha, C., Pairaudeau, P. W. and Lindow, S.W. (2010) Multidisciplinary antenatal care for opiate-using women: Child-care issues. *Drug & Alcohol Review*, 29(2), pp. 189-192.
11. **Attitudes and beliefs:** This category covers research that reports the attitudes (affective responses) and beliefs (thoughts about) any aspect of child maltreatment. These may be the attitudes and beliefs of any groups directly involved with child maltreatment or the general public. It also includes various constructions and conceptualisations of child protection. E.g. McCartan, K. (2013) From a lack of engagement and mistrust to partnership? Public attitudes to the disclosure of sex offender information. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 15(3), pp. 219.

## Appendix Three: Testing the search strategy for robustness

A number of checks were carried out to test the robustness of our searching and screening strategy and its adequacy for capturing the available research as comprehensively as possible.

First, a manual check was made of a number of key academic journals in order to establish whether any articles published within the journal during 2013 could have been missed by our search.

The electronic archives of the following journals were accessed in order to individually check every 2013 issue of the following:

- The British Journal of Social Work;
- Child Abuse and Neglect;
- Child Abuse Review;
- Journal of Interpersonal Violence;
- Journal of Sexual Aggression;
- Child: Care, Health and Development;
- Children and Youth Services review;
- Archives of Disease in Childhood;
- Child and Family Social Work;
- International Journal of Nursing Studies;
- Journal of Advanced Nursing; British Medical Journal;
- The Lancet;
- International Journal of Legal Medicine;
- Annals of Emergency Medicine.

Those publications that matched our inclusion criteria were then cross-checked with the articles already coded in our SPSS dataset, and four extra potential inclusions were identified which had not been returned by the original search terms. Although the number of potential articles missed by our search terms was small, the fact that they had not been returned by our search terms led to further discussion on how to refine the balance between sensitivity and specificity in our search and final tweaks to search terms were made.

A second check was carried out by examining the individual and/or institutional websites of four academics known to the research team as people publishing a significant amount of research in the areas of child protection or the care of looked after children. All the academic articles they published in 2013 were checked against our SPSS dataset and no additional articles matching our inclusion criteria were found.

Third, to improve the sensitivity of the search terms, further checks were undertaken to establish how to increase comprehensiveness without including articles whose link to maltreatment was too tangential.



New searches were run one at a time by adding potential new search terms to the original ones, recording the number of extra hits compared to those already detected for the year 2013, and estimating the number of extra inclusions that could be expected (assuming the inclusion rate found in previous searches remained constant). The following additional search terms were tested:

- *unaccompanied asylum seeker\**;
- *domestic abuse*;
- *domestic violence*;
- *harmful sexual behaviour*;
- *out of home care*;
- *looked after*;
- *child protection*;
- *domestic*;
- *adopt\**;
- *foster\**;
- *adopt\* or foster\**;
- *suicide or "self-harm"*;
- *"kinship care" or "residential care"*
- *"self-harm" or filicide or homicide*.

As well as a variety of combinations of these terms, it was also decided to run an additional test using just the original search terms, but changing the setting from *SU Subject Terms* to *TX All Text* for those search terms relating to maltreatment. This generated three times the original number of hits, but of greatly decreased relevance.

Some of the additional terms that were tried in the above list (such as *unaccompanied asylum seeker\**) yielded no extra hits, while others (such as *domestic violence*) yielded a disproportionately high number of extra hits irrelevant to our search.

It was agreed that terms such as *suicide* or *self-harm* should be excluded, as articles tackling these topics would meet our inclusion criteria only if framed in the context of child maltreatment and these would be already adequately captured by our original search terms, making the use of additional terms redundant.

The fourth test consisted in examining the research output of the University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre over the last five years in order to check it against our inclusion dataset. As a research centre specialising in child protection, the Child Protection Research Centre constituted an ideal testing ground.

Out of 109 publications identified for the relevant five year period, eight were found to have already been included in the academic literature dataset, an inclusion rate consistent with our previous searches of *Searcher* and *ASSIA*. In addition, a further 22 publications identified as grey literature had already been included in our grey literature dataset. However, three academic articles which met our inclusion criteria were found to be missing from the academic dataset; a closer look at the original search results showed that none of these three papers had been returned by *Searcher* during the data collection phase.

A sixth check was carried out in order to understand the reasons behind this discrepancy and ensure that the representativeness of our data was not being compromised. It was chosen to compare the number of academic articles returned by *Searcher* over the period 2010-2014 with the hits returned by a single database, in this case *PubMed*.

After running a search with the search terms and criteria used in the original data collection phase, it was found that *Searcher* returned a total of 4,475 academic articles for the 2010-2014 period, whilst *PubMed* returned zero. However, changing the setting for all search terms from *SU Subject Terms* to *TX All Text* considerably widened the net, with *Searcher* returning 151,969 results and *PubMed* returning five (including one of the Child Protection Research Centre's missing papers identified in the previous test). While the additional hits returned by *Searcher* appeared to be mostly irrelevant to our search, four out of the five *PubMed's* additional hits met our inclusion criteria, and three had already been coded in our dataset. This suggests that the way in which individual databases index academic articles according to subject may vary significantly, and that any search strategy striking a balance between sensitivity and specificity may inevitably result in a minority of eligible papers being missed.

These tests suggest that at least three quarters of available UK child protection research has been captured by our dataset. Based on this high rate of inclusion we can be confident in the representativeness of the articles included in our research, and in the generalisability of the results of our analysis.

Finally, additional random checks were carried out throughout the data collection phase to test the sensitivity of our search strategy and ensure that the highest standard of academic rigour was being maintained.

Random publications on the topic of child maltreatment and/or looked after children have been suggested by various members of the research team who have had no access to our dataset and these have been systematically checked against our list of inclusions.

## Appendix Four: Identification of organisations undertaking child protection research and collation of grey literature.

The grey literature is recognised as a key source of evidence and innovation in many disciplines, including health and social sciences (Pisa Declaration 1991), and it was therefore important to include it in the wider review of child protection research in the UK. Grey literature is often defined as

That which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers.

(<http://www.greylit.org/about>)

Grey literature may or may not have gone through a process of formal peer review prior to publication. This is a variable process, and is not always overt. For example, the grey literature reviewed for this mapping exercise often acknowledged the contribution made by individuals, other than the research team, in preparing and/or reviewing the publication but did not make it **explicit how this process was carried out nor the degree to which peers' comments may have influenced the contents of the publication.**

Because the grey literature is not published commercially nor through more conventional channels such as published journals or monographs, searches of the grey literature are less straight forward than searches of the academic literature. There are now a number of online resources that specialise in gathering and publishing grey literature, such as the *New York Academy of Medicine Grey Literature Report* (with a focus in health services research) and *The Grey Journal* (covering all disciplines and topics) as well as databases dedicated to grey literature searches, such as the CINAHL Plus (with a focus in nursing and allied health) and *Open Grey* (a system for information on grey literature in Europe). These are helpful resources but have still a number of limitations such as not offering the same searching capacity as more traditional databases, such as JSTOR, and there being no databases with a focus on child care and protection issues. Due to these limitations, and constraints in terms of the time available to the team to carry out this review, these resources were not searched.

The review of the grey literature was primarily based on searches of the NSPCC library catalogue carried out by NSPCC librarians between December 2014 and January 2015.

There were ten distinctive searches carried out using the following search strategies:

- 1) abus\* OR neglect\* OR protection (Keywords) AND "2009-2014" (Year) AND research (All fields)
- 2) "adopted children" OR "\*adoption\*" OR "adoptive parents" OR "children in care" OR "residential child care" OR "foste\*" (Keywords) AND research (Keywords) AND "2009-2014" (Year)
- 3) bullying (Keywords) AND research (Keywords) AND "2009-2014" (Year)
- 4) "self-harm" OR suicide (Keywords) AND research (All fields) AND "2009-2014" (Year)
- 5) "peer abuse" (All fields) OR "adolescent abuse" (Keywords) OR "partner violence"

(Keywords) OR "abusive children" (Keywords) OR "abusive adolescents"(Keywords) OR "dating violence" (Keywords) AND research (All fields) AND "2009-2014" (Year)

6) abus\* OR neglect\* OR protection (Keywords) AND evaluation (Keywords) AND NOT research (All fields) AND "2009-2014" (Year)

7) "adopted children" OR \*adoption\* OR "adopted parents" OR "children in care" OR "residential childcare" or foste\* (Keywords) AND evaluation (Keywords) AND NOT research (All fields) AND 2009-2014 (Year)

8) bullying (Keywords) AND evaluation (Keywords) AND NOT research (All fields) AND 2009-2014 (Year)

9) "peer abuse" (All fields) OR "adolescent abuse" (Keywords) OR "partner violence" (Keywords) OR "abusive children" (Keywords) OR "abusive adolescents"(Keywords) OR "dating violence" (Keywords) AND evaluation (Keywords) AND NOT research (All fields) AND "2009-2014" (Year)

10) suicide (Keywords) OR "self-harm" (Keywords) AND evaluation (Keywords) AND NOT research (All fields) AND "2009-2014" (Year)

The NSPCC librarians also carried out individual website searches of 14 external agencies. In addition, where these original searches picked up annually published reports (e.g. Violence in England and Wales Annual Reports compiled by the Violence and Society Research Group at Cardiff University) for one specific year but not others all reports published between 2010 and 2014 were checked and, if they fitted the inclusion criteria, were also included.

## Appendix Five: Huddersfield Register

There are 270 studies listed in the University of Huddersfield's web-based register of UK child protection research. Information about these was collected in three distinctive phases:

- 1) 1997 – questionnaires posted to heads of relevant departments from every university in the UK, chief officers of all relevant statutory agencies and major voluntary organisation in the UK and members of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN)
- 2) 2002/2003 – questionnaires emailed to individual academics in relevant departments in every university in the UK chief officers of all relevant statutory agencies and major voluntary organisation in the UK and members of BASPCAN
- 3) 2011 – current authors (Dr Bernard Gallagher and Ms Claire Fraser) own online submissions.

The register includes research carried out from 1995 up to 2012 – although the vast majority was carried out prior to 2010 and would therefore be automatically excluded from this review. Where information about publications related to these studies was available, more often than not these were publications in peer reviewed journals. Of the 270 studies listed in the register only one fitted the inclusion criteria for the grey literature.

## Appendix Six: Scottish Government

The Scottish Government provided a list of 17 studies on child protection carried out or funded by them. The list provided was following a request for relevant studies and it is far from comprehensive. We are aware that there are other studies which could have been included but are not immediately obvious on the Scottish Government website.

Of the 17 studies listed all but one were excluded because:

- Three were statistical reports
- Two were internal documents not available on line
- Three had been published in 2009, one in 2008, one in 2006 and another in 2004
- Two were academic publications
- One was a website
- One was not research
- One had already been included in previous searches

## **Appendix Seven: Search of external organisations' websites carried out by NSPCC Knowledge and Information Services.**

Searches were also carried out in the websites of 14 external organisations using the same parameters as the searches carried out within the NSPCC catalogue and the tools available on individual **websites**. **The organisations' websites searched were:**

1. Action for Children
2. BAAF
3. **Barnardo's**
4. C4EO
5. **Children's Society**
6. **The Children's Commissioner for England**
7. **The Children's Commissioner for Wales**
8. Department for Education (DfE)
9. The Fostering Network
10. Lucy Faithfull Foundation
11. **National Children's Bureau (NCB)**
12. Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
13. Research in Practice (RIP)
14. Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People

## **Appendix Eight: The academic and grey articles**

Access to the database of articles created for this report can be obtained by writing to the NSPCC at [library@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:library@nspcc.org.uk) or the University of Edinburgh by contacting:

Dr Simon Temperley  
Research and knowledge Exchange Officer  
Moray House School of Education  
Email: [simon.temperley@ed.ac.uk](mailto:simon.temperley@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0)131 651 6636



## Appendix Nine: Definitions of abuse

Our definitions of abuse were developed according to NSPCC priority areas that can be found at <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/>

- Physical Abuse: corporal punishment and physical discipline; violent death; non accidental injuries and trauma; any physical injuries (that were not of a sexual nature); fabricated or induced illness.
- Sexual Abuse: contact and non-contact; intra-familial and extra-familial; sexual exploitation; grooming and online grooming; harmful sexual behaviour; and female genital mutilation.
- Emotional Abuse: emotional maltreatment; emotional neglect; psychological abuse; deliberate humiliation or fear.
- Exposure to Domestic Abuse: exposure of a child to controlling, bullying, threatening, or violent behaviour between two adults in a relationship; experience of an adolescent or teenager of violent, controlling, bullying, or threatening behaviour in their own personal relationships.
- Neglect: deliberate or non-**deliberate failure to meet a child's physical and emotional** needs. Deliberate or non-deliberate failure to provide safety, care, and love.
- Trafficking: including unaccompanied asylum seekers; children who are recruited, moved, or transported for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced servitude, criminal activity, forced marriage, or fraud.
- Bullying: including peer to peer and adult to child; physical; emotional; cyber bullying; deliberate behaviour that harms the child.
- Undifferentiated: studies which did not specify the type(s) of abuse and/or maltreatment **were classified in our dataset as 'undifferentiated'; literature on looked after children or** the child protection system when the type of maltreatment was not otherwise specified.

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH/NSPCC  
**child protection  
research centre**



**NSPCC**

University of Edinburgh/NSPCC **Child Protection Research Centre**  
Dr Simon Temperley  
Research and knowledge Exchange Officer  
Moray House School of Education  
Email: [simon.temperley@ed.ac.uk](mailto:simon.temperley@ed.ac.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0)131 651 6636

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Document id: K201505